

*Guardians of Nature: Tibetan Pastoralists and the Natural World* provides a clearly written and very insightful view of the political economic, environmental, and social-cultural transformations that are reshaping lives and livelihoods on the Tibetan Plateau today. Written as a first-hand narrative account of his work over several years with villagers in Hashul Township, Yulshul as a member of Shanshui, a Beijing-based conservation organization, Tsering Bum's perceptive book discusses all of the key issues of contemporary Tibetan pastoralism: mining, the importance of the caterpillar fungus economy, resettlement, co-ops, education policy, human-wildlife conflict, and sacred mountains. It also explores quite new phenomena, such as Tibetan pastoralists hiring Han Chinese as herding laborers while living off of caterpillar fungus income, and the rise of feral dogs in Yulshul town as a result of the sharp drop in Tibetan mastiff prices, itself a byproduct of Xi Jinping's anti-corruption drive. Tsering Bum's analysis is informed by critiques of nature-culture binaries and illustrates clearly the many effects of perverse policy incentives. It is strongly recommended for anyone with an interest in understanding Tibetan pastoral areas today.

—Emily T. Yeh, Department of Geography, University of Colorado-Boulder

*Guardians of Nature: Tibetan Pastoralists and the Natural World* brims with information on contemporary issues related to the environment, China's economy, and the culture of Tibetan pastoralist communities. From an outsider's perspective, the author highlights the booming caterpillar fungus business, the rise and fall of the buying and selling of mastiffs, resettlement policies and their aftermath, earthquake reconstruction, environmental conservation movements, inequality within and between communities, fear of mining, brown bear attacks, and a lost generation of young pastoralists. This valuable book is a rich source for those wanting to learn more about Tibetan pastoralism in this rare moment of history amid unprecedented socio-economic transformations.

—Konchok Gelek, Sengze Village, Jyegu Town, Yulshul City, Yulshul Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai Province, PR China

Tsering Bum's informative, insightful, and highly readable manuscript has important Tibetan viewpoints on livestock grazing, mining, pika poisoning, human-bear conflict, sacred mountains, and other issues.

—George Schaller, Vice President of Panthera

AHP 42 GUARDIANS OF NATURE: TIBETAN PASTORALISTS AND THE NATURAL WORLD

TSERING BUM



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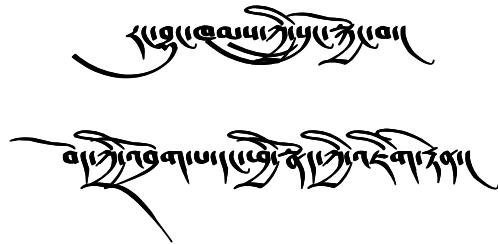
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# GUARDIANS OF NATURE

## Tibetan Pastoralists and the Natural World

ସନ୍ଦୂର୍ବିଜକ୍ଷଣ ନାମପାଇଁ | TSERING BUM





**Guardians of Nature**

**Tibetan Pastoralists and the Natural World**

**by**

 **Tsering Bum**

*ASIAN HIGHLANDS PERSPECTIVES (AHP)* is a trans-disciplinary journal focused on the Tibetan Plateau and surrounding regions, including the Southeast Asian Massif, Himalayan Massif, the Extended Eastern Himalayas, the Mongolian Plateau, and other contiguous areas.

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COVER: (Top) Gomri villagers venerating Karpo (Tsering Bum 2013), (Bottom) Gomri village conservation team with Tsering Bum and his colleagues (Yunxiang Wang 2013).

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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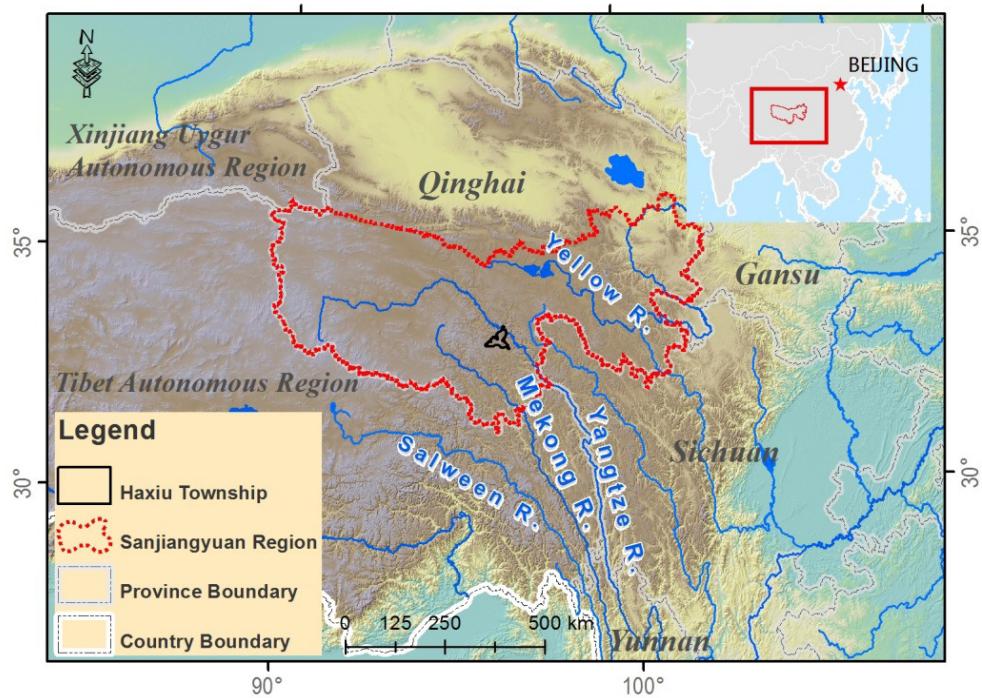
# MAPS

Yulshul Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in yellow and Yulshul City in red.<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> This is an edited version of <http://tinyurl.com/nupdbqu>, accessed 1 July 2015.

Hashul Township and National Sanjiangyuan Nature Reserve in Qinghai Province (map by Liu Yanlin).



## PREFACE

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In my mind, I see the Three Rivers Source region as a magical land, a place where lammergeiers soar high overhead and snow leopards still prowl the rocky crags, where the local horses prance across the tops of the hummocks as if on tiptoe, and the men dance with wild abandon. It is a place where humans and wildlife have adapted to the harsh climate of the high Plateau in ways that have evolved over eons, to live in harmony with nature, not striving to overturn it. In my mind, it is still a place from which our world, weary of the emptiness of economic growth without prosperity, could study and learn a more sustainable approach to living.

Of course Yushul was never exactly like this, even when I first visited in 2002. A carnival of changing policies had already rocked and shattered traditional approaches to land management. As I remember one old nomad describing it, "First they told us to form communes and move to the town, then, when we were starving, they told us to move back to the pastures and raise more yaks and sheep, then they told us we had too many yaks and sheep, and they told us to divide the pastures and put up fences, now they tell us to move off the land again..."

And the changes that have come since then have made the region even farther from my imagined reality. The black yak hair tents are nearly all gone, horses have been traded in for motorcycles, and commercialism and over-exploitation are changing the landscape, perhaps forever. With the collapse of the price of *bu* this year, one can only fear for the worst.

We might easily despair for the cultural traditions of the nomadic herders of Tibet, one of the last great nomadic traditions on earth. And despair for the people; that they will ever be able to follow a more sustainable approach to improving their living standards. The rush of change and the destruction already done sometimes must make it seem almost hopeless for those fighting to protect the rare beauty and biodiversity of Yushul's pastures, wetlands, and mountains.

And yet, as the author reveals in the pages that follow, there is still a kernel of something magical at the core of the beliefs and practices

of the nomad herders of Hashul; something that can blossom into dedicated and selfless efforts to maintain the health of the land and the integrity of the life that it supports. It is not hopeless. There will always be hope, as long as there are Guardians of Nature like Jamyang Sangpo and Tsering Norbu - and Tsering Bum, the author himself.

Baima Dorje

20 September 2015

Gyaltang

## AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

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**B**ecause I am a Tibetan working in a Chinese NGO (non-governmental organization), I am often asked to explain what Tibetans think about current environmental issues, conservation programs related to Tibetan-inhabited regions, and various other topics. This puts me in a difficult situation. I can offer only my own perspectives. Cultural Tibet is a vast area inhabited by people of different economic and cultural practices and often speaking mutually incomprehensible dialects/languages. There is no homogenous perspective that constitutes a generic Tibetan way of thinking. Furthermore, as someone who has spent years in cities and modern academic settings, my experiences and interactions with local communities are relatively limited. My ethnic identity as a Tibetan cannot be used as legitimate authority to represent such a diverse collection of people in a rapidly changing society.

These experiences and thoughts motivated me to live and work with Kham Tibetan pastoralist communities in Yulshul Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai Province in order to learn about their interpretations of a changing natural environment and their responses to those changes.

Tibetan herders are often affected by statist conservation undertakings, however, their voices are routinely ignored in the decision-making process of conservation projects that promise to profoundly transform their lives. While there is now a good deal of consensus among Chinese policy makers and government leaders about the important role of Tibetan pastoralists in conserving the environment, this has remained at a discursive level without action to implement community-based conservation initiatives.

This book is intended to give greater visibility to the grassroots conservation efforts of Tibetan pastoralist communities.

This text is not an attempt to interpret the relationship between Tibetans and their natural world. Instead, it merely seeks to represent the lives of one group of Yulshul pastoralists in Hashul Township at a particular time based on my experiences and my interpretation of the context.

I intend to represent how Hashul Tibetans are responding to the complexities of a rapidly changing society, how they perceive and make sense of the changes around them, their cultural perceptions of the natural environment, and their efforts to adapt to new environmental challenges, as well as their efforts to engage in and solve related issues with the knowledge and resources they have.

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## CHANGING LANDSCAPE

ZILING

**I**t was late October 2012. Four new Shanshui recruits - including me - gathered in Ziling (Xining), the capital of Qinghai Province, to meet a few other colleagues the night before leaving for Yulshul. Ziling is about 260 kilometers from my home in Mangra County in east-central Qinghai, and about 800 kilometers from Jyegu, the prefecture seat of Yulshul. Shanshui Conservation Center,<sup>2</sup> the Chinese environmental NGO headquartered in Beijing and for which I would work for the next few years, has a branch office in Ziling. The office would be the place where we gathered for work meetings when we were in town.

Tibetans refer to this city as Ziling, but now Han Chinese, the majority ethnic group living in the city, refer to it as Xining, or Western Peace. This city was familiar to me because of its historical significance to Tibetans and my lived experiences there. In imperial times, it was a contested region, a borderland between empires. Texts often portray the region as in a constant state of flux, falling out of the control of central powers, and also often portray the general area of Qinghai unfavorably. For example, the famed Tang Dynasty (AD 618-690 & 705-907) poet Du Fu (712-770 CE) wrote in *Soldiers and Chariots* (751 CE):

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.shanshui.org/>, accessed 22 June 2015.

...

People feel doomed when they have sons.  
Parents prefer to have daughters instead  
Because after they marry, they can still be neighbors.  
A son will be killed on the battlefield and later buried in weeds.  
Look at the shore along Qinghai Lake.  
Since ancient times, the white bones of soldiers have not been buried.  
New ghosts cry out and old ghosts weep.  
The howl of ghosts is intermittently heard on cloudy, rainy days.<sup>3</sup>

In times of great upheavals and social turmoil, it became a place of exile, for instance, in 842 CE, Lhalung Paldor shot an arrow into the forehead of the last Tibetan king - Uдум Tsanpo - while pretending to be a *cham*<sup>4</sup> dancer, and fled to Amdo. He passed through Ziling before settling 150 kilometers to the east. When Uдум Tsanpo tried to eradicate Buddhism in Tibet, three monks in central Tibet, better known as Kaipa Musum 'The Three Sages' secretly brought many Buddhist scriptures to this place in the hope of saving Buddhism. Later, 400 years after the death of King Uдум Tsanpo, their disciples successfully reinvigorated Tibetan Buddhism by spreading the teachings of the texts The Three Sages had salvaged.<sup>5</sup>

The city is important historically, not only for Tibetans, but also for Han Chinese, Monguor (Tu), Mongolians, Hui (Chinese Muslims), Mongolians, and Salar (Sala) who reside in and around the city. Today, it is the largest city on the Tibetan Plateau with more than two million people, of whom more than 120,000 are Tibetans.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Translated by Li-Chung Wang on Little Fairies Publications <http://tinyurl.com/jtyrdsw>, accessed 20 January 2016.

<sup>4</sup> A masked and costumed dance performed at Tibetan Buddhist festivals.

<sup>5</sup> Rgyal mo 'brug pa 藏文大藏經. 1995. Bod kyi lo rgyus gleng ba'i gtam 藏文大藏經 [History of Tibet]. Beijing 北京: Min zu chu ban she 民族出版社 [Nationalities Press].

<sup>6</sup> Population statistics are from <http://tinyurl.com/zehgkww>, accessed 20

The city also has several universities that provide some opportunities to minorities who speak a minority language. For this reason, I was able to enter an English language training program at one of the universities, and studied there for four years. I lived in Ziling for about five years before enrolling at Reed College in Portland, Oregon in 2008.

I made many friends while living in Ziling and by 2015, many had worked in the NGO sector for years. When we met to catch up and I told them that I wanted to live in a rural community for the next year or two, their common reaction was that without internet access, I would be so bored that, within two weeks, I would probably give up and return to Ziling. Many Tibetans I know are like others living in China today - they view city life as highly desirable. It was easy to discuss my plans with friends in the NGO sector, owing to our shared interests and backgrounds. However, when I talked to Tibetans and Chinese who were not associated with NGOs, the reaction I received was often hard to deal with, e.g., "Why would you go to a remote herding place to work?"

"Because I'm interested in learning about the lives of local people," I typically replied. This seemed a very inadequate answer. Many I interacted with thought that I should work in a city or, even better, work in a government office in order to have an "iron rice bowl" - job security for life. I understand this reaction. Economic development has facilitated and driven urbanization, creating 'rural' and 'urban' as binary opposites. Many in China are convinced that the city is the space for the civilized and developed, whereas rural areas are symbolic of backward, uncouth people. The goal then of higher education is to live and work in a city.

## JYEGU TOWN

We started our trip to Yulshul at ten AM on a public bus. Yulshul is an autonomous Tibetan prefecture of Qinghai Province. It consists of five counties<sup>7</sup> and Yulshul City. Yulshul Prefecture has an area of 267,000 square kilometers with a total population of 283,100 people (95.3 percent Tibetan).<sup>8</sup> This is almost twice the physical size of Nepal with a population of a little more than one percent of Nepal's. In terms of Tibetan dialects, Yulshul Prefecture is part of the Kham Tibetan region. Yulshul is also considered to be ecologically important by local Tibetans, government, conservation NGOs, and just about everyone else with an interest in the environment. As the source area of the Mekong, Yangtze, and Yellow rivers, Chinese conservationists often call Yulshul and its surrounding areas Sanjiangyuan 'Source of Three Rivers'. Sanjiangyuan - officially known as Sanjiangyuan National Nature Reserve<sup>9</sup> - encompasses 395,000 square kilometers of Qinghai Province, a landmass twice the size of the state of Washington in the USA.

We expected to be in the bus for at least fifteen hours because of the distance and the bad roads. Jyegu suffered a 7.8 earthquake in April 2010. Thousands died. Following this tragedy the state vowed to build a town much more "advanced" than its pre-quake condition. Consequently, better roads were being built to

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<sup>7</sup> The five counties are Drido, Chumarleb, Zado, Nangchen, and Chridu.

<sup>8</sup> Population statistics are from <http://www.qhys.gov.cn/zmys.html> accessed 2 March 2014.

<sup>9</sup> Known as Sanjiangyuan guojiaji ziran baohu qu 三江源国家级自然保护区 in Chinese, it includes all of Yulshul and Golok Tibetan autonomous prefectures, parts of Dartso and Bartsong counties of Tsolho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Tsekog and Sogtsong counties of Malho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, and Dangla Township in Tsonob Mongolian and Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture.

link Yulshul to the capital city to make the transportation of construction materials easy. Inconveniences due to road construction meant that our bus was even slower. It took us about twenty hours to reach our destination.

Since travel between Ziling and Yulshul often took so long, each bus typically had two drivers so one could drive while the other could rest. The buses made a few stops along the way for about thirty minutes, which was long enough for passengers to slurp down a bowl of noodles in restaurants along roads running through the towns on the way.

Yulshul buses were of two types: ones with seats, and the sleeper variety that featured bunk berths separated by a narrow aisle that ran the length of the bus. We took the seat bus on the advice of our colleagues. They said that when entering the sleeper bus everyone was required to take off their shoes, put the shoes in a plastic bag, and place the bag by their own berth, resulting in a horrendous stink.

## 2005: FIRST YULSHUL VISIT

On this long, tiresome bus ride, I had plenty of time to think, to reflect, and to recall my previous experiences in Yulshul. This was not my first trip to Yulshul. I had visited in the summer of 2005 as an interpreter for a project evaluation team of an international NGO that had funded development, education, health, and cultural preservation projects in the region.

I vividly recalled Jyegu Town from that time. Its traditional Tibetan architecture intrigued me. Lining each side of the Tsachu River, most buildings were no more than three stories tall and made of wood and stones. Most were restaurants, hotels, and clothing and food shops, and many were run by local Tibetans. The official

statistics at that time indicated that while the town population consisted of Tibetan, Han Chinese, and Hui, more than ninety percent were Tibetans. I also noticed that Tibetan women in particular wore traditional Tibetan robes in their everyday lives. This differed markedly from my own home area where few Tibetans wear their traditional clothing, except during festivals such as the Tibetan New Year period and at weddings.

As I walked about the town observing these particular features, I could not help noticing Jyegu Monastery atop a hill on the north side of the town. It is a special feature of Yulshul that monasteries are frequently situated atop mountains and hills, overlooking the towns and villages below, as if providing protection. In contrast, many Amdo monasteries are located at the foot of mountains.

On my 2005 trip, Jyegu was a resting and rendezvous point for us. We spent most of our time in the surrounding herding communities where the projects were located. Homes were mostly black yak hair tents scattered over the pastures, with often a few kilometers between each household. There were also some adobe-wood houses, but black yak hair tents dominated in the herding communities.

Historically, Tibetan herders have led nomadic lives in search of better pastures and to give the grass time to recover after a period of grazing. The yak hair tent can be taken down, packed up, and re-pitched whenever it is needed. Yaks and horses were the main means of transportation, and yak hair tents were the main residence of Tibetan nomads.

My trip was an eye-opener in terms of understanding life in Yulshul. However, I was not doing my job as an interpreter very well. Tibet<sup>10</sup> has traditionally been divided into three regions - U-tsang,

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<sup>10</sup> By "Tibet," I refer to Goldstein's "ethnographic Tibet" (1994:76-77)

Amdo, and Kham known as "Cholkha Sum Three Provinces." These areas are now administratively in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), and the provinces of Sichuan, Qinghai, Gansu, and Yunnan. Many current Tibetan and Chinese literary references refer to these five contemporary administrative divisions as Jongzhing nga (Wushengqu) 'Five Provinces and Region'. The prefectures of Yulshul in Qinghai, Nagchu in the TAR, Dechen in Yunnan, and Karze in Sichuan are Kham areas. Except for Nagchu, most of the remainder of the TAR is U-tsang. Ngawa Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture of Sichuan, Ganlho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture of Gansu, and all of Qinghai Province excluding Yulshul are in Amdo.

Later when my Han Chinese colleagues asked me about differences between Kham and Amdo dialects, I said it was similar to the difference between Mandarin and Cantonese. Within these three dialects, there are many sub-dialects that may be unintelligible to those speaking only the main sub-dialect. In the Amdo community where my parents live, Rongkad 'farmer's dialect' and Drogkad 'nomad dialect' are spoken. Of the two, the nomad dialect is considered the 'purer' dialect of Amdo because both Drogkad and Rongkad speakers contend that nomad dialect more closely reflects textualized Tibetan grammar and has fewer Chinese words. Amdo Tibetan famers often live in close proximity to Han Chinese and Muslim communities. Consequently, their dialect is considered to be more influenced by the languages of those ethnic groups.

I am an Amdo Tibetan who speaks a farmer's dialect as his first language, who found himself in a Kham herding area in Yulshul trying to fulfil his duty as an English-Tibetan translator. My employer

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(Goldstein, Melyvn C. 1994. Change, Conflict and Continuity Among a Community of Nomadic Pastoralists: A Case Study from Western Tibet, 1950-1990 in R Barnett and S Akiner (eds) *Resistance and Reform in Tibet*. London: Hurst and Co, 76-111).

spoke English, which I translated into Amdo dialect. Locals had little idea what I was saying and I often felt ridiculous.

I was able at times to communicate using changes in pronunciation, gestures, and body language. They often then gave an elaborate answer in return. I learned as a child that many Tibetan elders are eloquent speechmakers. You might ask a question expecting a short, direct answer, and instead find yourself absorbed in a long speech. It is considered very rude to interrupt the speaker even if you are struggling to complete a short, timed interview according to a schedule. The other option is to just listen until the speaker finishes and continue to the next question.

In my case, I understood little of what was said as we attempted to evaluate projects. Some people tried to communicate with us using different pronunciations and also gestures. Eventually we hired a second interpreter - a local Yulshul Tibetan who was fluent in spoken Chinese and Tibetan. For the next few weeks, my boss talked to me in English, I then translated into Chinese, and the other interpreter translated my Chinese into Kham Tibetan. Locals spoke to him in Kham, which he translated into Chinese, and I then translated the Chinese into English.

I blamed myself for my inability to speak Kham dialect and creating this cumbersome process but at that time I had encountered few Yulshul people, and had erroneously assumed the differences between dialects were minor when I took the job.

My experience in 2005, and later during my work as a conservationist in Shanshui, told me that many non-Tibetans consider Tibetan dialectical differences to be negligible. When hiring locals, "Tibetan" is often listed to mean that someone was needed who understood local contexts. Many outsiders consider Tibet and Tibetans as a homogeneous area and people, ignorant of the fact that

Tibet consists of complex, diverse groups of peoples, traditions, and dialects.

## 2009: SECOND YULSHUL VISIT

My second trip to Yulshul was in July 2009, the year before the earthquake devastated Yulshul. I had returned to China from the United States for summer holiday. I was the only Tibetan on an American rafting team that consisted of several Americans and Han Chinese. This provided an excellent opportunity for me to explore the Yulshul landscape that I had not experienced before, and from a new perspective - from a river looking out at the countryside. I was hired to negotiate with local villagers residing alongside the Druchu 'Yangtze River' when we landed at different points to spend the night. I was also tasked to communicate cultural taboos and sensitivities to the team.

On this ten-day trip, we rafted downstream from Drido County, the source of the Yangtze River, to Yulshul County. Other than a few more buildings and hotels, Jyegu was not much different from what I had seen in 2005. I observed the biggest difference compared to 2005 on the way to Drido. Identical concrete houses were on both sides of the road. There were few yak hair tents although there were other types of tents, often blue tents with Chinese characters spelling out Minzheng Jiuzai 'Civil Affairs Disaster Relief'. The government had provided these to the locals as a way of "alleviating poverty," and supposedly providing better living conditions than traditional yak hair tents.

The concrete houses were part of the state's project to resettle herders in towns in order to "protect" the grassland. Started in the mid-2000s, the logic was that irrational Tibetan nomads were

overgrazing and destroying the grassland ecosystem. As a result, herders were encouraged to reduce the size of their herds and move into state-built concrete houses, thus converting a nomadic way of life into a sedentary one. Tibetan herders and many scholars have never accepted the overgrazing argument, citing the region's historical herding practice and its successful co-existence with nature. Conversely, policy makers have often ignored such claims as *bu kexue* 'unscientific'. Nevertheless, either encouraged by the state, or on their own free will, many herders accepted those government houses and moved into resettlement towns.

Local Tibetans I have talked to firmly hold the view that there is no overgrazing in the traditional herding system. Conversely, state policy makers consistently see overgrazing as fact. There is no middle ground. Many Tibetans suggest that the state actually knows there is no overgrazing, but use ecological conservation and the policy of *Shengtai yimin* 'Eco-resettlement' as an excuse to relocate nomads into towns so that they are less mobile, more reliant on state subsidies, and thus more easily administered.

As we rafted down the river we did not see many locals. We often camped in areas of great natural beauty that could not be easily reached by land. We did, however, meet one family when one of our two inflatable rubber rafts flipped over, forcing us to land at the foot of a mountain. Although we managed to turn the raft back upright, during the process one side was cut open by a sharp rock in the water. We therefore opted to spend the evening there, gluing and patching the damaged raft.

It was while we were here that we met a family of three - a man in his mid-twenties, his mother, and his wife. They were very excited to see us. We learned that the wife had had a miscarriage but because of the heavy rains, the man had been unable to take her to hospital. That month, it had rained so much that rivers were swollen

and all the roads to local towns were inundated. He asked us to take her on our raft. Unfortunately, we could not help. Not only were we unable to fix our raft, but the river was still rising. We were unable to guarantee our own safety, let alone his family's safety if they were to travel downstream with us.

After much talking back and forth in a mix of dialects, he and I were able eventually to communicate our thoughts. He agreed that it was too risky for his wife to travel with us and decided to wait for the river to fall. We started off again early the next day with mixed feelings about our safety, but we had no choice. We would have run out of supplies if we had waited for the river level to drop. Luckily, after rafting downriver for about two hours, we landed at a place with a fairly peaceful water flow near a tributary of the Yangtze. We stopped there to eat some snacks that we had bought in Jyegu.

While eating, we saw a man riding a motorcycle on a route hidden by bushes in the distance. With relief we realized that a road was nearby so decided to ask the man for help and then return to Jyegu. We waved enthusiastically and after about ten minutes, he rode over to us. He said that he had been in front of his house using a telescope to observe some white-lipped deer on a mountain and had, by coincidence, seen us so decided to come over out of curiosity.

I reported our dilemma, and he decided to help. I rode his motorcycle with him to a family of his village that owned a truck. After much negotiation, we agreed to pay the truck owner 3,000 *yuan* to take us to Jyegu. We deflated our rubber rafts and then folded and loaded them into the truck along with our tents, food, and personal bags. Once everything was loaded, we piled into the truck and sat on our belongings as the truck drove out of the valley towards Jyegu. Even though it had been a rainy month, the Plateau sun had already dried the unpaved mountain roads so it was a very dusty seven-hour trip back to Jyegu. Nevertheless we were very relieved

knowing that we could safely get back to Jyegu instead of risking more flip-overs on the river. This was the last day of our rafting trip. We returned to Xining the day after we reached Jyegu.

## 2012: AUGUST: THIRD YULSHUL VISIT

My most recent trip to Yulshul had been in August of 2012, just after I joined Shanshui. I was asked by my boss to join a member of a team of Chinese Nature scientists who planned to work in Zojya Township, Drido County. The site was more than ten hours west of Jyegu Town by vehicle. This was my first time to Yulshul after Jyegu, and since then, in 2010, the surrounding regions had been hit by an earthquake. I took a bus from Ziling to Jyegu. When I arrived, I could not believe that this was the same place I had previously visited. Almost everything I had seen before had vanished: the narrow streets, Tibetan restaurants, shops, and the hotels that often had featured monastery names. All had been decimated by the earthquake. I tried to locate the hotel where I had stayed, and the restaurants where I had eaten, but could not. It was a landscape of rubble. Reconstruction was underway and the Civil Affairs Disaster Relief tents seemed to be pitched everywhere. Chinese construction companies and workers were removing the rubble as they worked on new houses and buildings from scratch.

The local Yulshul Prefecture government had promised to finish post-quake reconstruction work within three years, that is, by the end of 2013, and build a new Yulshul that would be at least thirty years more developed and "advanced" than the pre-quake version. Efforts were being made to meet this promise. The rumble and roar of machines was not a scene that I enjoyed after arriving in Jyegu. I

soon caught the "public transportation," a mini-van operated by a local man, and set off for Drido County.

## 2012: OCTOBER: FOURTH YULSHUL VISIT

As the bus I was on with my colleagues continued on a dusty road towards Yulshul, past memories appeared in my mind one after another, as if preparing me for what was to come.

A fellow traveler, a Tibetan colleague from Labrang, Gansu Province, asked me for advice. He had never visited Yulshul, and saw me as experienced because of my previous visits. I was not confident enough to say much. Changes in local landscape were what I had observed in the past. I felt my limited ability in the Kham dialect did not allow me to comment on how Yulshul locals perceived their own lives and other changes taking place. I was in no position to play the "expert." In the end, I only described what I had seen and encountered during my visits.

After graduating from college, I had enthusiastically come with the intention of doing conservation work in Tibetan regions. Before returning home, some of my friends in the US were puzzled by my decision. They thought that I should either try to stay in the US or at least continue my education by applying to graduate schools. However, I had never considered living permanently in the US. My family and my home is back in Tibet. While I do intend to pursue further education eventually, my background as a student of anthropology tells me that I should stop formal schooling for a while and engage in real social life.

I do realize that Tibet's culture, economy, and spatial landscape are rapidly changing. Many young Tibetans, while spending a great deal of time in cities and colleges pursuing modern

education and life, often ignore rapid, on-going changes in their home areas. Nevertheless, they still feel they have authority to speak for Tibet. This is dangerous and may lead to misrepresentation in the context of unprecedented change. More close, in-depth research and understanding of local life is necessary by anyone wishing to focus on Tibet.

## THE RESETTLEMENT TOWN

Our bus arrived in Jyegu at seven AM the next morning. Most passengers were napping, nodding back and forth, or more soundly asleep, slumped to one side in their seats. The bus driver shouted that we had arrived. Passengers reluctantly stood, as if dream walking, and disembarked one by one. My colleagues and I collected our luggage and walked for about ten minutes to Shanshui's temporary office on the outskirts of Jyegu Town. The office consisted of two rooms in a temporary, two-story building with several rooms, made of a light steel frame and thin wooden panels. It, and other identical structures in a long row, had been put up by the Yulshul Prefecture Government for use by administrative offices of the prefecture government till reconstruction was complete. The two rooms, one for men and the other for women, featured several beds. Rather than an office, it was more of a place for Shanshui staff to stop and rest whenever they passed through.

After resting for about two hours, we bought some food including instant noodles, vegetables, and energy bars at a nearby tent shop. Then we left for Hashul Township of Yulshul County in two cars that Shanshui operated. The objective of our visit was to conduct a baseline survey of Yonthar Village in Hashul, as well as a feasibility study for a blue sheep monitoring program in the village.

"Village," known in Chinese as *cun*, and *dewa* in Tibetan, is the lowest administrative level in China's political administration. Farming communities, herding communities, and herder resettlements all are termed *cun* officially to describe a place and the group of people who are considered residents in terms of household registration.

Even though Hashul was only eighty kilometers from Jyegu Town, road construction meant that the journey took four hours, and then another two hours to get to Yonthar Village. Before arriving in Hashul, I knew that my biggest challenge would be comprehending the local Kham dialect. My anthropological training at Reed cautioned me about attempting research without knowing the local language. Without such knowledge, representing the local situation and voices accurately is problematic. I fully understood that I had to learn the local dialect before I could conduct meaningful work. It would be a difficult task, but I comforted myself by saying, "Relax! At least it is a dialect of Tibetan, not an entirely different language!"

The first town we encountered on our journey was Rongbo Town, which sits seventy kilometers from Jyegu and ten kilometers from Hashul Township seat at the road junction to Drido County and to Hashul Township. In 2013, Rongbo Town consisted of six Tibetan herding communities and had a total population of about 5,000 people. The size of the town is 1,856 square kilometers.

Rongbo is famous for its wetlands that host black-necked cranes in summer. Black-necked cranes are endangered because of the loss of wetland where they live and procreate. It is estimated that as of 2011, there were only about 10,000 black-necked cranes left in the world. These majestic birds, known as *chongchong* in Tibetan, have immense cultural significance. Tibetans may refer to them as *lhasha* 'celestial birds'. In the eighth century, the sixth Dalai Lama - Tsangyang Gyatso (1683-1706) - composed the following poem about

*chongchong:*

White Crane!

Lend me your wings

I will not fly far

From Lithang, I shall return

Lithang refers to the present Lithang County in Karze Prefecture, Sichuan Province. Later, the seventh Dalai Lama was born in Lithang, and the poem was interpreted to mean that the sixth Dalai Lama had indicated the birthplace of his next incarnation. The King Gesar Epic<sup>11</sup> recounts how King Gesar's wife, Drugmo, was captured by the Kingdom of Hor. Drugmo told the celestial birds to send a message to King Gesar to inform him of her capture. The birds did so, leading King Gesar and his retinue to his wife whom they rescued.

Longbao National Nature Reserve is about five kilometers east of Rongbo Town seat. It is one hundred square kilometers in size and features major wetlands for black-necked cranes. Since the entire Yulshul Prefecture falls into the Sanjiangyuan National Nature Reserve, Rongbo is thus a national level nature reserve within a larger national level nature reserve. The Qinghai Provincial Government has a department - Sanjiangyuan Management Office - responsible for "protecting" endangered species and ecosystems in the nature reserves. However, as this office has only a dozen staff who mostly live in Ziling, the term "nature reserve" mostly remains on paper without practical application.

Hashul Township seat is about ten kilometers north of Rongbo Town. The concrete road to Hashul runs through the middle of a valley, along the Yuchu River that flows through Hashul Township Seat, before moving through Achro Township, and finally

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<sup>11</sup> King Gesar is an epic believed to date from at least the twelfth century telling of the heroic deeds of King Gesar - the lord of the legendary kingdom of Ling.

emptying into the Yangtze River. Many herder families reside along the banks of the river and fetch drinking water from Yuchu River. Their livestock and such wildlife as blue sheep, white-lipped deer, and Tibetan gazelles also drink at the river at night. Hashul Township is located at the lower end of Gomri, Walong, and Dongjyu valleys.

Hashul Township seat closely resembled Rongbo Town seat in appearance. It also featured nearly identical, state-built concrete buildings. The township had fewer shops and restaurants compared to Rongbo. There were two prominent official complexes - the Hashul Township Boarding Primary School and the township government. The township seat, Tsanbo thang 'Ferocious Land', has a background deserving further comment. *Tsanbo* is a term describing Tibetan kings before the collapse of the Tibetan empire in the eighth century AD. When I asked the meaning of "Tsanbo thang," locals were unable to explain - a lost memory.

An open area called Tashi tha thang 'Auspicious Land of Horses', with rows of concrete homes was located about one kilometer north of the township government compound. It was part of the Tsanbo Thang area. In the summer of 2013, the township government gave Shanshui a building to serve as our office for three years. After some time, locals told me that this area was actually Tashi dur thang which, though similar to the name mentioned above, has a very different meaning stemming from *dur* 'grave', or 'Grave Land'.

"Some monks thought it was better to put 'auspicious' in front of this name," one villager said, and joked that I should beware of the ghosts there.

When I asked why it was called Grave Land, he answered that the bodies of many locals who had died there in battles during the 1950s were buried there. "Don't worry, these are the ghosts of good people. They won't harm you," he added as he saw puzzled

concern written on my face. I later looked for literary references to *dur thang*, but found nothing.

While 2012 government statistics indicate that the township seat had 400 houses built for villagers to resettle, most houses on the Tashi tha thang area were empty. Locals humorously said that they could exchange a house for an i-phone, implying the uselessness of the houses. Many families owned livestock. To graze them, they had to live on the grazing land. Consequently, living in a house in the township seat was impractical because it was far from their livestock and pastures. Still, the township seat was a busy place.

Hashul Township consisted of Yonthar, Gomri, Walong, and Ganyi communities. The township seat was where locals purchased clothes; food such as flour, rice, and vegetables; and consulted township government staff about matters related to government projects. It was also where their children were schooled. It provided a restaurant where you could eat with friends and family, a court in front of the township government compound where you could play basketball, and it was a place to just hang out.

The four communities were made up of 1,300 households with a total population of about 4,800, all living within a land area of 1,353 square kilometers. Prior to the 1950s, Hashul was a tribal community under one tribal leader. Later, the traditional tribal structure was replaced with a township government and four administrative communities.

## HASHUL MONASTERY

Roughly about two kilometers west of the township seat and halfway up a mountain is Hashul Monastery in the Geluk 'Yellow Hat' tradition. Overlooking Hashul Township seat, this monastery

consecrates Shugden, a protector deity no longer worshipped by many Geluk devotees. In Yulshul, those who venerate Shugden are outnumbered by those who oppose such worship. Those who object to such worship sometimes discriminate against Shugden followers. Shugden devotees mainly reside in Drido County and the Hashul Township area.

In the summer of 2013, I hired a car in Jyegu to travel to Hashul. I asked the driver - a Jyegu Tibetan - to take me to Hashul Monastery and some nearby households. He refused, saying that he would not go to the homes of local people, let alone the monastery because, "It will bring bad luck."

Most locals I met were unaware of disputes related to Shugden, although I never intentionally asked people about this practice. One day a local in his late forties, who had been educated in Hashul Monastery when he was young, asked me my opinion about Shugden practice. He knew that I was from a part of Amdo where Shugden is not consecrated. "I respect your beliefs, and you also should respect mine. We shouldn't try to force each other into believing what we think is true," I said.

Pleased with my answer, he said, "Hashul Monastery is very near us. We often need lamas and monks to perform rituals and chant for us. They are like the township government - the only level of authority and power we can reach. The higher lamas and incarnation lamas are like the leaders of the central government. Though they care about us, we cannot depend on them to help us with our daily needs. I know Rinpoche is a great, compassionate lama, but we must listen to lamas of Hashul Monastery. Rinpoche is too far from us."

I was impressed with how his understanding was based on local residents' realistic, practical needs.

Administratively, Hashul Township is not recognized as an official government body above the prefecture level. A few years ago,

the Qinghai Provincial government promoted converting *xiang* 'townships' to *zheng* 'towns' as evidence of regional economic development. In line with this policy, the Yulshul County government re-titled some townships and merged certain townships with neighboring towns under the rubric "town."

The official plan was to merge Hashul Township with Rongbo Town. Consequently, Hashul Township does not exist at the provincial government level. However, at the local level, it remained a separate township. When I eventually asked township government employees about this, they said that villagers in Rongbo do not venerate Shugden, and local officials were afraid that a merger would create disputes between Hashul and Rongbo community members. This is one of many local realities policy makers at higher levels of governments ignore when sitting in a meeting room, jotting down orders to be sent to local governments and communities to implement.

The Shugden issue has recently moved from a religious issue to a political one. For example, Tibetans traditionally used otter, leopard, tiger, and fox skins to decorate clothing. Most of these animals are endangered, and environmentalists and many modern Tibetan scholars condemned this use of their pelts. Nevertheless, many Tibetans clung to this practice, saying that it was a tradition that should be kept alive and passed on. In 2005, this practice was denounced by higher religious figures as inappropriate, unethical, and environmentally damaging. Almost immediately movements were launched all across Tibetan regions of China to remove animal skins from traditional clothing and burn them as a symbol of giving up the practice. Most Tibetans followed this trend and gave up wearing animal skins entirely. But in areas where Shugden is consecrated, Shugden monasteries did not encourage local communities to follow the higher spiritual leaders and give up the

practice. As a result, wearing animal skins and furs is still practiced in areas such as Hashul, putting local Hashul residents in conflict with Tibetans of other regions.

What was once a conflict of religious beliefs is now represented visually through differences in clothing. This put environmental organizations and local governments at odds with local communities. From an environmental standpoint, we wanted to encourage locals to discontinue wearing animal skins. However, this approach now raises the issue of Shugden practice, and could easily be misunderstood as encouraging local villagers to give up Shugden veneration. Furthermore, local government authorities are concerned that encouraging local communities to no longer own animal skins and furs might lead higher level authorities to question whether their efforts are environmentally or religiously/politically motivated.

My understanding of this and other issues came a year later when having spent more time at the township seat, I was now able to easily converse in Kham.

When my colleagues and I arrived in Hashul, I assumed that this was my first visit to Hashul, however, a month later, I visited a herder's family in Yonthar Community. As I sat on a sofa across from two men in their early thirties, in a concrete house, I took out my notebook and a pen, ready to ask questions about their livestock. The two men murmured to each other while glancing at me from time to time. Thinking they were discussing matters of importance, I waited for them to finish while sipping from a bowl of tea poured for me by the lady of the house.

"I know you," one of the men said abruptly. "We met three years ago. You hired my family's truck in 2009. I drove you and several foreigners to Jyegu from the banks of the Yellow River," and continued to describe this encounter in detail.

I then recalled the 2009 rafting trip, the rented truck,

passing through a village or two, and our arrival in Jyegu. I had not realized the township we had passed through was Hashul, and that the man who had helped us was from Yonthar. Later that night, I searched on my computer for the photos of the rafting trip and located pictures of Yonthar and Hashul that I had taken in 2009. The area had changed dramatically in three years. In 2009, as we had passed through Yonthar Village and the Hashul Township seat, there had been few houses, and the landscape was almost untouched by development infrastructure. The only modern structures were the township government complex, the primary school, and Hashul Monastery. Now the area was disfigured by rows of identical, ugly houses. Though the 2010 earthquake had been a disaster for thousands of locals who lost their lives, lost loved ones, or suffered serious injury, it had been a bonanza for local government. They quickly had gained access to disaster relief grants to speed up resettlement. The subsequent new house construction process in various townships completely changed the local landscape to the point of unrecognition. It had all taken place in just three years.

Jyegu Town (Dorjee Tashi, 2009).



Jyegu Monastery (Tsering Bum, 2009).



Jyegu Town after the 2010 earthquake (Hang Yin, 2010).



Hashul Township (Tsering Bum, 2009).



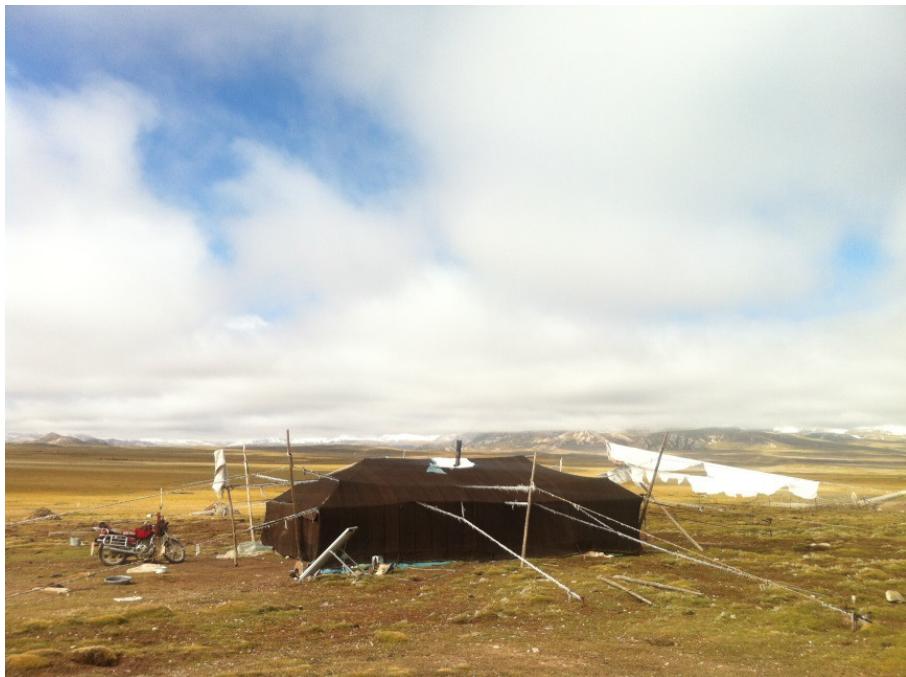
Hashul Monastery (Tsering Bum, 2009).



Hashul Township (Kunga Yugnyan, 2014).



A traditional yak hair tent in Hashul (Tsiring Bum, 2009).



Typical herder's house in Hashul (Tsiring Bum, 2014).



## CATERPILLAR FUNGUS

YONTHAR SUMBA

The road from Hashul to Yonthar extends into the administrative jurisdiction of Achro Township to the north. It then turns west, crosses a river, goes deep into a valley, and reaches a pass more than 4,000 meters above sea level. On the other side of the pass is an even bigger valley with small branching valleys that run into the mountains on both sides. This is the territory of Yonthar, a community consisting of three *rukag* 'natural villages'. The upper part of the valley features Yonthar Dangpo 'First Yonthar' as it is known by locals. The middle part belongs to Yonthar Nyipa 'Second Yonthar', and the lower part that borders Chumarleb County with the Yangtze River as the dividing line belongs to Yonthar Sumba 'Third Yonthar'.

We were headed to Yonthar Sumba and its rich biodiversity of snow leopards, brown bears, white-lipped deer, blue sheep, wolves, Tibetan foxes, and so on. Shanshui had conducted ecological studies in the area and, with a foundation already laid, our mission was to continue the relationship already forged, and promote conservation work in the community. With the help of local leaders, we stayed at Jonda, the gathering center of Yongthar Sumba. Jonda had a local, government-built Party Members' Activities Office, situated at the bottom of a large valley. Next door was a small Buddhist temple that had been built by the office. Jonda was also the place where post-quake housing construction had created lines of mostly vacant brick houses, reminiscent of housing at the Hashul Township seat.

The Party Activity Office featured several rooms and enough beds for all ten of us. The next day we visited households in different valleys to learn more about their understanding of local ecology and their concerns related to potential environmental issues and threats. We did this for the next seven days. I was not much help. I had no previous experience in the field of conservation, and my inability to speak the local dialect made me feel useless. My Chinese colleagues were also unable to speak Kham Tibetan. Luckily, a local Tibetan staff member and a Tibetan from Amdo who had spent more than a year in Yulshul and was fluent in the local dialect were with us. We relied on them for translation.

My limited ability in the Kham dialect meant that in my first few months, I learned less about local life and culture than I had hoped. My resolve to stay and learn more about local life intensified a week into my stay. One morning as I was brushing my teeth outside the house, a line of mostly luxury all-terrain cars purred slowly along a road deep in the valley. They kept coming, one after another, as if there was no end. My colleagues came out to see and we counted more than seventy cars as they passed by Jonda. My colleague, Zhao Xiang, said that those cars belonged to the villagers. The former village leader's son was marrying a woman from another community. The vehicles were accompanying the groom to the bride's community to bring her back to Yonthar.

I was shocked to realize that a community located so far from major towns, with inconvenient transportation, had the wealth to own so many expensive vehicles. This newly-found wealth was mainly due to the lucrative caterpillar fungus business across the Tibetan Plateau. Yonthar Sumba was a major area for caterpillar fungus, both in terms of quantity and quality. I was eager to learn how a distant herding village's new riches were changing and shaping the lives of local residents, how they were adjusting to this new

wealth, and what they were doing with all this cash. This interest in Yonthar Sumba encouraged me to stay on.

Most of my colleagues returned to Ziling after our initial visit to Yonthar. Only my colleague, Zhao Xiang, a young man from Jiangsu Province who had spent the previous year in Yonthar; Xie Xiaolin, a young woman from Guangdong Province; and I were left in the community. As members of Shanshui, we were actually not in a rush to do "conservation work." We needed time to learn about local organizational and leadership structures, and the basic needs of locals, including the conservation issues they wanted addressed. I knew that this was all essential in order to accomplish something meaningful. I also needed to learn the dialect in order to have meaningful, deep-rooted conversations with Yonthar residents. It was the beginning of two years of close interaction with the communities of Hashul.

#### TANWANG'S FAMILY

Two weeks later, we moved from the Party Members' Activities Office to the home of Tanwang, the leader of Yonthar Sumba. Tanwang suggested that staying at his home would be more comfortable for us and we gladly agreed. Tanwang's two-story stone and brick house is about two kilometers from Jonda in the main valley at the foot of a mountain. His father was the former Party Secretary of Yonthar and, to some extent, Tanwang had inherited his father's legacy of leadership. He was in his early thirties and married to Tsanyang Tso, a woman in her late twenties, who was from the same community. They had been married for more than ten years, and had a seven-year-old son and a ten-year-old daughter.

Only a few local families, mostly current and former

community leaders, had two-story houses. The first floor of Tanwang's house was divided into three sections: a combined living room and kitchen, a bedroom for Tanwang and his wife, and a storage room for grain, meat, and other foods. The second floor was divided into three sections: a closed balcony with two beds, a big guest bedroom with three one-person beds, and another living room that featured Tibetan style beds and sofas. The living room had *thangkhas*<sup>12</sup> and pictures of local lamas on the walls. Zhao Xiang and I were told to share the guest bedroom while Xie Xiaolin was assigned to the balcony bedroom. Tanwang's son and daughter slept on the other balcony bed.

Knowing that the other living room was reserved for important monks and lamas, I rarely entered that space. During the next two years I was often in this home, but never saw any lamas or monks visit, at least not while I was present. However, the space was always reserved for a future possibility and remained a sacred space that mundane life was not to defile.

Just in front of the house was a garage for Tanwang's all-terrain car, and a government-built livestock enclosure with a plastic roof. The government had built such animal enclosures for local families free of charge. Tanwang had converted the enclosure into a storage room for dried yak meat, coal, and yak dung. Most families used these enclosures for storage, although some lived inside the enclosures in winter. The plastic roof of the enclosure created a greenhouse atmosphere, making it warmer than their concrete homes and tents. The government argued that building animal enclosures would provide better conditions for raising yaks and sheep, thus increasing income, while locals did not believe they needed such enclosures for yaks. This illustrates how excluding locals from the

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<sup>12</sup> Tibetan Buddhist paintings on cotton, silk, or fabric, usually depicting Buddhist deities.

decision-making process in policy creation can generate unexpected results.

Tanwang's livestock enclosure is adjacent to an open-air enclosure with stone walls. He had hired Chinese construction workers to build the walls and that is where he kept his family's yaks. Nearby was a small meadow that Tanwang's family used as their toilet.

I chatted with Tanwang's family about the things they did everyday - where they went, the names of and stories about nearby mountains, and so on. This was often fruitless in the first two months because they usually could not understand me, or I could not understand them. While aware of my linguistic limitations, I realized that everyday I was learning and understanding more of the local dialect. I also engaged in daily labor, trying to help in anyway possible to show appreciation for the roof over our heads. This also provided an opportunity to chat.

One day, when Tsamyang Tso was about to go fetch drinking water from the Yuchu River, about a half-kilometer south of their house, I insisted on carrying her big bucket. She usually carried water on her back in a big plastic bucket while her son and daughter carried small buckets. At first she refused, however, after a ritualistic process of me insisting and Tsamyang Tso refusing, she finally gave in and agreed to let me help. After carrying the water back to the house, I poured it into a larger plastic container in the kitchen intended for daily use. This was refilled whenever it was nearly empty. Tsamyang Tso had to fetch water at least once every three days. Each time she fetched water, she made about five trips to the river. After that session of fetching water, I felt that I could be useful around the house.

Tsamyang Tso told me that I should not engage in such labor. "This is women's work," she said. "Local men will denigrate

you if you do such work."

"That's fine," I said. "In my home village, men are required to do this sort of work. I'm used to it." This was a white lie. In fact, men in my home area do not do much housework, but I grew up in a family with three sisters, and I know how hard daily house chores can be. This kind of conversation and work - fetching water, cooking food, sweeping the rooms, and so on - continued during my stay there. It was all a great help to me, learning about local daily life while simultaneously learning the dialect.

Yonthar had no phone signals so I was not able to regularly contact my family and friends. I felt cut off from the rest of the world. Tanwang's family had a TV and a satellite dish that provided multiple channels. Most families in Yonthar had the same, either given to them by the local government, or bought by the villagers themselves. I was not a fan of Chinese TV shows and news reports, but in the absence of alternatives, even these programs were of interest. The TV could also receive Kham dialect programs from Chengdu, Sichuan Province, and Amdo dialect programs broadcast from Ziling.

Tsamyang Tso and Tanwang often watched Tibetan language programs that typically offered Tibetan dance and singing performances, or Chinese TV shows translated into Tibetan. However, Tanwang's children, seven-year-old son, Nor, and eight-year-old daughter, Choje, were not interested in such shows. Instead, they were devotees of a CCTV cartoon channel, so my choices were to leave the room or stay with them and watch whatever they were watching.

What bothered me most was not my lack of interaction with the outside world. After all, when I decided to join Shanshui and come to Hashul, I knew I was leaving much of the rest of the world behind. The real issue was being unable to communicate with locals. I had never before been in a situation where I did not understand what was being said around me. I grew up speaking Amdo Tibetan. My

home village's close proximity to local Qinghai Han Chinese communities made it easy for me to understand the Qinghai Chinese dialect. Later, when I attended schools in the seat of my home county I began learning Mandarin Chinese with my other Tibetan classmates.

After junior middle school, I was recruited into an English Training Program and, for four years, attended courses mostly taught in English by foreigners at a university in Ziling. Now, living in a Tibetan community where I could not communicate well, I felt frustrated and discouraged.

In April 2012, I had been in Portland with some of my friends from the rafting adventure. It was then that I had decided to join Shanshui. I was to graduate in late May and was planning to return home, but lacked a clear idea as to what job I might find. When friends asked what I had in mind, I firmly announced, "Environmental conservation in Tibet."

This surprised my friends, who thought that as a student of anthropology, I would be more interested in cultural studies. I explained that my background made me well suited for the field of environmental conservation in Tibetan areas of China because most of these areas have nature reserves inhabited by local Tibetans, and that traditional Tibetan culture and livelihood played major roles in the conservation of biodiversity in these areas. Many Chinese policy makers often focused on the biological side of the ecology of the area while ignoring local people's cultural practices and their impact on the environment.

My friends regularly travelled to Tibetan areas to raft, and easily understood my logic and concerns. They were also well acquainted with conservation NGOs in China and were willing to recommend me to one of them. "Are you interested in working at a desk job with generous pay or doing real conservation work with the

local people at the grassroots?" one friend asked half jokingly.

I replied that I was tired of sitting at a desk, staring at a computer screen and would appreciate recommendations to organizations with grassroots activities. In the end, after a few months of direct contact with Shanshui, I became a team member, thereby realizing my dream of "engaging local people."

Such plans and ideals did not buoy my spirits for long. I was frustrated, and missed everything I had left behind. To deal with this, I occasionally took a book and read it out loud near the Yuchu River where Tsamyang Tso fetched water. The Yuchu was bright and so clean that pebbles on the bottom could be easily seen. The rushing melody of the river filled the whole valley with a rhythmic, musical sound. My reading-out-loud was absorbed by the river's symphony. No passersby could hear me and then conclude I was demented. It was liberating. At night, sitting in bed with a blanket over my sleeping bag, I would take out my computer, and type out what I had experienced, observed, heard, and talked about during the day. In the beginning, there was not much to write because of my limited ability to communicate. So, after making a few notes, I would begin reading books and papers related to ecology, partly to compensate for not taking ecology courses at college.

Tanwang's family had electricity so I could comfortably read. To generate the electricity Tanwang had purchased a small hydroelectric generator and placed it in a stream near his home. Electricity had to be generated day and night because the generator lacked a voltage transformer and storage unit. The TV, light bulbs, and refrigerators moderated according to the voltage level. When I turned off the light before going to sleep, Tanwang would come running up the stairs, turn the light back on saying, "Don't turn off the light. It will kill the engine of the generator."

"How nice! I can work and read all night!" I said.

He would smile as he left.

It was November and already freezing on the Plateau. Yonthar, surrounded by mountains with little wind, was relatively warmer than other parts of Hashul, but it was still freezing. The temperature was routinely minus twenty degrees Celsius at night. Sleeping in a warm sleeping bag with a blanket atop worked fine for my body, but when my hands were out to operate my laptop or read a book, they soon got cold. My colleague, Zhao Xiang, whose bed was across from me, read from a Kindle that did not require both hands to hold and turn the pages. He was very proud of his Kindle, which I envied.

Tsanyang Tso often had *tsampa* prepared for us in the mornings. This common Tibetan food is made from ground roasted barley that is mixed with yak butter, *chura* 'dried cheese', and hot tea. Once mixed together, it resembles cookie dough. My colleagues and I had also brought vegetables and other food with us. Tanwang's family, and my colleagues and I cooked and ate together. However, most local Tibetans do not eat spicy food, so whenever we cooked something with green pepper or chili, they would not eat it.

A main food for Hashul Tibetans is *shagam* 'air-dried yak meat'. After a yak is butchered in winter, the meat is chopped into pieces and hung from the ceiling of a storage room. Over time, it becomes dry and edible. I love this meat and enjoyed it whenever it was offered when I visited a family. Sometimes, Tanwang would go with me to nearby families, point at me, and say to the others, "He eats dried yak meat. He is Bod." This term refers to Tibetans. Small moments like this that make me feel less of an outsider.

We stayed at Tanwang's home when we were in Yonthar, and also stayed in many other homes when we visited other communities. Due to our prolonged visits, we often brought vegetables and rice. We cooked with the families we stayed with, and

ate together with them. We also tried to pay when lodging was provided, but it was often awkward. Local hospitality dictated that staying for one or two nights in homes was fine. Sometimes, even total strangers passing through were welcomed to stay for a night.

One time when we tried to pay for a one month's stay at Tanwang's house, he refused insisting that it was not necessary. I could see unease on his face when I tried to give him money. I imagined he was thinking that we had established a friendship based on staying at his house and interacting with him everyday, and now I was trying to pay for such friendship and hospitality.

Monetizing such a social relationship was not ideal. Nevertheless, our stay at local families was often long and we felt that we should compensate for that at least indirectly. Locally, it is an accepted norm to give gifts to children, so we paid Tanwang by saying that he should buy books for the kids to read, or use the money when they went to school to pay for books, notebooks, pens, and pencils. Tanwang's children did not attend school. The primary school was located in the Hashul Township seat, and Tanwang was not ready to send his children to a boarding school at such a young age. While appreciating the importance of education, he worried about their well-being at the far away school if he were to send them there.

Yonthar's village level primary school was closed in 2008 by the local government. Most village level primary schools in Yulshul Prefecture were closed around the same time. The official reason was that the quality of education quality at these village level schools was poor. The government argued that education quality and infrastructure could be improved by consolidating schools at the township seat. However, in reality, most herding families are far from the township seat primary schools, and parents would worry about the wellbeing of young children living there. Some families chose either to not send children to school at all, or to send them to the

primary school when they were older. As a result, most children were sent to primary schools after they were ten years old.

Tanwang worried about the education of his children. One day he asked me to be a teacher in Yonthar. Unfortunately, I was not able to agree. I worked for Shanshui, and my responsibilities and interests were in the study of local culture and ecology, and in promoting conservation work. To compensate, I bought Tibetan language textbooks from Jyegu for his children and taught them Tibetan when I had time, but that was only occasionally. I often visited other families during the day and recorded what locals told me, which I then typed up on my computer at night. This gave me little time to teach them on a regular basis.

"You should stay in Yonthar Village and teach Tibetan, Chinese, and arithmetic to the local children," he said.

I politely refused, but promised to look for a teacher.

Tanwang said that he hoped I would find a Tibetan, so that the villagers could communicate easily on matters related to education. "We will pay a good salary for a teacher - as much as you guys earn these days. We will also provide lodging, food, and butcher two yaks for the teacher to take meat home at the end of the year," Tanwang said.

Sadly, I was not able to find anyone. Interest was stirred when I said, "It's a great village on the banks of the Yangtze River with wonderful scenery. You can see wildlife everyday." This interest quickly evaporated when I added, "However, there's no phone reception nor easy access to the outside world." I had to frankly communicate this truth. No one I contacted seemed willing to live in a realm without connections to the world of mass media and telecommunications.

During my first few months, the villagers thought that I was there for a short time to sightsee and look for wildlife. They did not

expect me to stay for very long and called me "Amdo," implying "that guy from Amdo," and did not bother to learn much about me. I made frequent visits to families with my colleagues, and also went alone. I wanted to get to know locals and used what simple Kham dialect I had picked up from everyday interaction with Tanwang's family. Gradually I was able to understand simple conversations, and some villagers were able to understand me if I spoke slowly. My frequent presence, endless visits, and numerous questions meant locals began to remember my name. I thus became "Tsering Bum."

## HIDDEN TREASURES

One morning, it was snowing heavily outside. After breakfast, unable to go anywhere, I sat by the stove in the living-room and started reading a novel. Tanwang was listening to music from a Kham dialect radio program while sipping a cup of milk tea, Choje and Nor were watching cartoons on TV, and Tsamyang Tso was busy cleaning the house, washing the dishes, and refilling the stove with yak dung to keep the fire going.

Tanwang's father, Mingyal, entered the room at that time. In his late seventies, he lived with his younger son in his house about fifty meters from Tanwang. Though he and Tanwang were separate households, they cooperated, including jointly hiring a shepherd to herd a shared pasture. I stood saying, "*Demo*," an Amdo Tibetan term for greeting that means "How are you?" as well as meaning "Good," when used to answer a greeting. Kham Tibetans often used the phrase "*Ka e ti?* 'Are you tired?'" as a greeting. After I greeted Mingyal in Amdo, I realized I had made a mistake.

He returned my greetings with "*Demo*," came inside, sat across from me, and fingered his aged, much-used prayer beads while

quietly chanting scriptures. "Do you know where we could buy a metal detector?" he asked after he finished chanting.

Puzzled and unsure how to answer, I closed my book and said, "Not really. What is it for?"

He explained:

Before the Cultural Revolution, my family owned some pieces of gold, gold deity sculptures, and other valuables. My family was wealthy. My father was afraid that our valuables would be confiscated and that he would be "struggled"<sup>13</sup> against so, in 1969, he took our treasures into the mountains and hid them. He planned to recover them later. After a year, he was taken away. In due time he was put in front of everyone with his hands tied behind his back and forced to confess being a capitalist roader. He was often beaten by Red Guards and jailed without food. He died in prison. None of us knew where he had hidden the treasures, which we have never recovered. I heard metal detectors can be bought and used to locate metal. I want to buy one and find those valuables.

When I asked for the details of his father's misfortune, Mingyal said, "I never believed Father was a capitalist. Father didn't even understand what that meant. The reason he was labeled a capitalist roader was that his family owned many yaks and was considered rich."

The Red Guards charged Mingyal's father with accumulating many yaks by stealing land and yaks from other families. Mingyal said his father was diligent, took care of his yaks well, and thus the number of his yaks had increased.

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<sup>13</sup> A struggle session was a form of public humiliation used during the Maoist era to create public opinions about concerned individuals and to humiliate, persecute, and even execute political rivals and individuals labelled as class enemies and capitalist roaders. The victim of a struggle session was forced to admit various crimes before a crowd who verbally and physically abused the victim until they confessed.

I knew of no markets selling metal detectors. Elders in my home village also told stories of hidden treasures including gold, old *thangkhas*, and deity sculptures from that earlier time of great social chaos. They had also asked me about how to locate them. I was never much assistance and told Mingyal what I said to everyone who asked: "I don't know, but if I encounter someone who does, I'll learn more and tell you."

"You're rich and don't need those treasures!" I said jokingly.

He laughed replying, "You're right. We don't need to find hidden treasures if *bu* stays the way it is now."

*Bu* 'worm' is the local term for *yartsa gumbu* 'summer grass winter worm' or 'caterpillar fungus' (*Ophiocordyceps sinensis*). Commonly found in Himalayan regions, *bu* is the driving force of Yonthar Sumba's economy as it is for many communities in the Yulshul area. It is a fungus that lives in symbiosis with the earth-dwelling larva of the *Thitarodes* ghost moth. The fungus parasitizes and mummifies the larva, forming a fungus-caterpillar complex. It is an ingredient in Tibetan and Chinese traditional medicines that is believed to be effective in building a strong immune system and preventing diseases such as cancer. Yonthar villagers also believe that it can cure many illnesses such as the flu and stomachaches. Boiling a piece of caterpillar fungus in water and drinking the liquid is thought to be a good general tonic.

Tanwang said:

When I was a child, my parents made me eat raw *bu* when I was sick. Sometimes they boiled it and made me drink the liquid. Sometimes they put several pieces in meat soup when we cooked meat. It made all of us healthy and stronger. However, we do not do that anymore. The price of *bu* is high and people think money is more important. We now sell every piece of caterpillar fungus that we collect. People use this money to go to

Jyegu to enjoy meals in modern restaurants, and buy big cars and drive around. People have changed.

While working with my colleagues to create a pamphlet on the sustainable harvest of caterpillar fungus, I was reading what I could find about it in Tibetan, and ran into a story<sup>14</sup> collected by Chopay Zangbo about caterpillar fungus in Kham Tibetan areas of Sichuan. Even though this story is not from Yonthar it provides another Tibetan group's perspective on caterpillar fungus.

I retell the story below:

Long ago, two brothers went into the mountains to collect wood for fuel. The younger brother fell off a cliff accidentally and was unable to climb out from where he had fallen. When he asked his older brother for help, the older brother thought, "My parents were very kind to me before my brother was born, but they are not very nice to me now. They love him more than they love me. They will love me more if my brother is gone."

With this dark thought in his mind, he left. The younger brother was very angry with his older brother. He finally starved to death, but before he died, he thought, "Even my brother didn't save me. Mankind has such a cruel dark heart." He was disgusted by human behavior and wished "Almighty deities! For my next life, please let me be reborn as something cruel and horrible for mankind. I will hurt humankind - hurt them till they have no place to live no where to go."

Because of his evil wishes, he was reborn as a worm during winter that suffered in cold weather, and turned into grass with its head suffering from the scorching sun of the Plateau day. One day, a man saw him, and thought that it was a precious thing. People then greedily started to collect it every year. Finally, Nature was angered and earthquake and floods destroyed communities.

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<sup>14</sup> I cite the story here, which was never officially published, with the consent of Chupal Sangpo, the collector of the story.

When I told this story in Yonthar, locals claimed that they had not heard such stories before, and that they themselves had no traditional accounts about caterpillar fungus. However, most believed that sensible harvest is necessary in order to protect the natural environment of their community.

Yonthar Sumba's unique geographical location makes it a favorable *bu* habitat. In order to share the financial benefits of *bu* among the Yonthar Sumba households, there were clear geographical boundaries with the other two natural villages - Yonthar Dangbo and Yonthar Nyipa. There was little interaction between Yonthar Sumba and these two communities in terms of economic and social activities. This is different in the other three administrative villages of Hashul Township, where the natural villages closely interact in economic, social, cultural, and religious affairs. The leaders of these other natural villages in Hashul have stronger relationships and work duties overlap when it comes to matters related to all of the villagers.

One reason for this is that these three administrative villages have relatively little to no *bu* resources, thus dividing the benefits of *bu* is a non-issue. The privatization of Yonthar Sumba's *bu* resources made its villagers the biggest benefactors of this natural resource, creating a sharp wealth gap between themselves and other Hashul communities.

The price of *bu* increases every year, from one yuan per *bu* in the 1990s, to ten *yuan*, then twenty *yuan*. By 2013, the average price per *bu* in Hashul was sixty *yuan*, and the highest price was more than one hundred *yuan*.

The rapid increase in *bu* value created a "gold rush." Since the late 1990s, villagers from Haidong Region in eastern Qinghai Province have come to Yonhar Sumba in May of every year to collect *bu*. These villagers are mostly farmers seeking income through digging and selling *bu*. Most of them are ethnic Hui, Monguor, Han Chinese, and a few Amdo Tibetans. As the price of the fungus has increased, the number of the villagers coming here has been increasing annually, particularly in recent years. The collectors from outside Yonhar Sumba need to pay for *buchu* 'fungus collecting permits' to Yonhar Sumba in order to spend a month in the village to collect *bu*. Permit prices in 2012 ranged from 7,000 to 12,000 *yuan* per person, depending in which valley the collector chose to stay. Price variation was determined by the richness of *bu* in different valleys based on local villagers' and outside collectors' observations from previous experiences.

Hashul is an exceptional case in terms of this "gold rush." Almost all the other townships in Yulshul banned outside collectors. The government decided to do this when several conflicts, some deadly, between locals and outside collectors occurred in Yulshul. Concern that allowing outsiders in would create social instability led officials to do what they generally do - ban outsiders. The Hashul Township government, however, did not follow, partly convinced by Yonhar villagers. The government staff were afraid that banning outsiders would create conflict between Yonhar villagers and the township government. Hashul villagers were then allowed to bring in outside collectors as long as no serious incidents occurred regarding *bu* collection.

In the summer of 2012, more than 2,000 *bu* collectors came to Yonhar Sumba during the *bu* collection season for outsiders,

usually from 20 May to 20 June. Many local men drive cars to the bus station in Jyegu around mid-May, and wait for collectors from Haidong Region to arrive. Once they arrive, they take their tents, food, and other belongings to Yonthar. In 2012, a common charge was 600 *yuan* per person for the drive, a distance of only about 120 kilometers. When they reach the village, the collectors are allowed to choose a valley after which they pay the appropriate permit fees. Villagers from Yonthar Dangpo and Nyipa do not need to pay for permits and are free to go anywhere in Sumba to collect caterpillar fungus. However, people from other villages in Hashul need to pay 1,500 *yuan* each for the permit to collect *bu* in Yonthar Sumba.

Memories of the local area's tribal history reminded locals that in the past they had belonged to the Hashul Tribe and there had been no divisions between them. Members of other Hashul villages, particularly from Ganyi, complained that it was unfair that they were required to pay 1,500 *yuan* for a permit. "It is so unreasonable that they take money from us! We are from the same township, and they have taken money from those Jya already. That's so much money for them. That's enough! Those Yonthar Sumba villagers are so greedy!" one Ganyi villager told me angrily when I asked him what he thought about the permit fees. He labelled all farmers from Haidong, regardless of ethnicity - Jya, the Tibetan term for Han Chinese. I often heard this description while in Hashul. Local people use Jya to describe outsiders who cannot speak the local dialect and hence used Mandarin to communicate.

Wanting to learn more, I asked some Yonthar villagers what they thought about other Hashul villagers paying much lower permit fees.

"They should pay the same amount as those Jya! They are not from Yonthar Sumba, so why should they pay less than Jya?" one man said, echoing the view of many other Yonthar Sumba villagers.

The answer was predictable, because Yonthar Sumba villagers wanted to maximize their income by collecting high permit fees. However, the 1,500 yuan permit fee was strictly set by the township government and nobody could change it. The township government was afraid that completely freeing other Hashul villagers from paying the fee would anger Yonthar Sumba villagers and lead to conflicts between communities. They also reasoned that setting a permit price for other Hashul villagers at the same level as the Jya would ultimately anger residents of the other three villages and lead to further conflict.

Though the township government often left the *bu* business to locals, in the case of permit prices, they felt compelled to step in to avoid bigger problems down the road. After several negotiations, the price had been set at 1,500 *yuan* for Hashul villagers and has stayed that way for several years. The township Party Secretary and the township leader, themselves local Yulshul Tibetans, were very pleased with this decision. Setting a relatively low price pleased Hashul villagers, and also satisfied Yonthar Sumba villagers by allowing them to collect permit fees.

In addition to collecting fees from outsiders, Yonthar Sumba villagers personally collect *bu*. However, 2012 was a poor year for *bu* harvest because of dry weather, and the large numbers of people that poured into Yonthar Sumba to collect *bu*. That year the number of *bu* collectors reached a record level. More than 2,000 people from outside Hashul Township, 700 residents from all three natural villages of Yonthar, and more than 300 people from other villages of Hashul were there. Collectively they occupied an area of 200 square kilometers, and not every piece of this land was *bu* habitat.

The final outcome for the 2012 *bu* harvest was a disaster for Jya, who had paid high permit fees and were unable to collect enough

*bu* to cover their permit fees, let alone pay for other expenses. They came together in Jonda and complained to Yonthar Village leaders. After several days of negotiation, Yonthar leaders returned about 2,000 *yuan* per person of the permit fees. In their desire to maximize profits, the Yonthar community leadership allowed in as many collectors as possible, ignoring the fact that there was not enough *bu* on their land to satisfy them all. In 2013, the township government stepped in again, restricting the number of non-Hashul collectors to 1,500 people. It was also a year of timely rainfall and good prices. The result was that collectors went home reasonably satisfied with what they had earned.

#### *BU MANAGERS*

In 2012, Yonthar Sumba had twelve people in charge of managing, collecting, and distributing permit fee revenue among the villagers. The Party Secretary of Yonthar Village, the leader of Yonthar Sumba, and Sumba's village accountant supervised nine team leaders who did the actual fee collection. They were paid for a month and had to ensure that every collector had paid for their permit. They fulfilled this duty by visiting the tents of collectors at night to conduct random checks. For this work, the Party Secretary, village leader, and the accountant received 25,000 *yuan* each, while the nine team leaders received 10,000 *yuan* per person for the *bu* collection season. These managers had to work hard to ensure everyone paid and no other troubles arose. Also, they themselves did not have time to go out during the day to collect *bu*.

The payment situation fluctuates depending on the amount of fees they collect. The payment decision was made informally by the twelve people in charge of the work, and was finally announced to the

villagers. In 2012, Yonthar Sumba collected more than eight million *yuan* in permit fees. The amount of money made by individual villagers from collecting *bu* could not be estimated because villagers often individually went to Jyegu to sell *bu* that they had personally collected. They often sold *bu* to local middlemen from the Jyegu area. With income from both *bu* permit fees and collection, the villagers did not mind slight variations or increases in managers' payments, at least according to Yonthar Sumba community members.

#### *BU DISTRIBUTION*

The way permit fee revenue in Yonthar Sumba is distributed can be traced back to land reform at the end of the Commune System in 1984 in the Yulshul area when land and livestock were distributed among household members. In 1984, Yonthar Sumba had about fifty households (200 people in total), who were then assigned land and livestock. Each household was given a *sayig* 'land certificate', known in Chinese as *caochang zheng* 'grassland certificate'. It states the size of the land a family owns and the names of family members with land ownership. The amount of land allocated was based on the number of family members. By 2012, the village had grown to about 130 households and more than 500 people. Officially, those born after 1984 do not have a land certificate, which is common in Qinghai in both herding and farming areas. Those born after 1984 have a *hukou* 'household registration', and generally live on the land of their parents and relatives who have a *sayig*. The land and livestock are shared among family members. When a person with a land certificate dies, the children inherit the land, which sometimes results in conflict between family members. For instance, Tanwang told me about a family in Yonthar with four sons and three daughters. After the

parents' death, the children struggled to inherit their parents' land certificate. One brother was even seriously injured in a knife attack by one of his brothers. Tanwang kept the identity of the family confidential, thinking he did not have the right to divulge the secrets of other families.

"What's the solution to such a problem?" I asked Tanwang when he finished telling me the story.

"There is no solution. The family members need to work among themselves and figure out a plan to avoid conflict," he said.

Those with Yonhar Sumba household registration received a different payment amount from the permit fees. Individuals with *sayig* received twenty percent of total permit fee income. The remaining permit revenue was then divided among all the villagers. In 2012, this meant that, although Yonhar Sumba's total population was 500 people, 1.6 million *yuan* (twenty percent) was first divided among 200 people who had *sayig*, each of whom received about 8,000 *yuan*. The remaining 6.4 million *yuan* was then divided equally among all 500 people, each receiving 12,800 *yuan*. Thus, the 200 people with *sayig* received 8,000 *yuan* more than the other villagers. Deng Xiaoping's land reform policies promoted privatization of land ownership in 1984 in the Hashul area but, at the same time, the fixed nature of the policy disadvantaged those born later. In 2013 and 2014, the total permit fee collected surpassed 15 million *yuan* each year, which meant that the amount received by each individual in these two years doubled in comparison to 2012. Most Yonhar Sumba villagers lived in extended families consisting of many members, and this allowed the total income of the household from permit fees to be significant.

The twelve people in charge carry out this process of dividing the permit revenue. The amount divided among local residents is done after allocating the salaries for *bu* management. It is

often done in Jonda at the Party Members' Activities Office after all the collectors have left Yonthar Sumba. Everyone, or at least their representatives who are entitled to a share of the money, gather on this day. First, Tanwang reports on the total permit fee income of the village, then he announces the amount of money individuals in different families are to receive based on the accountant's calculation. Funds are also set-aside as "public funds."

In the summer of 2013, the total permit fee income had increased to thirteen million *yuan*. After lengthy discussion with the villagers, the village leaders took the initiative and donated half a million *yuan* to Hashul Monastery to build a new stupa. They also allocated half a million *yuan* to build a new temple in Jonda. An amount of 130,000 *yuan* was allotted to pay a Yulshul Tibetan dance teacher from Jyegu and his assistant to teach Yonthar youth traditional Tibetan dances to be performed at a religious festival later that year. The teaching would last for three months. The dance teacher received 1,000 and his assistant received 600 *yuan* per day. All these matters were discussed in public with at least one member of each household present. After the sum of these expenditures, and deduction for payments to the *bu* managers, remaining funds were divided among the villagers as had been done in 2012.

In a village without modern means of communications, news still travels fast by word of mouth. In addition, male villagers drove to Jyegu to pick up the *bu* collectors, most of whom had a rough idea of how many people came and paid, how much total income the village had, and what the expenses were for events supported by their public funds.

Receiving payment based on *sayig* is strictly fixed. It cannot be changed as long as the land reform policies remain in place. However, household registry is another matter. Every PRC (People's Republic of China) citizen has a household registry fixed to the area

where they were born. Later, through a complex, time-demanding process, they move their registration to the area where they work or to the household of their spouse. In Yonthar, because a woman traditionally married and moved into the home of her husband, her household registration became the same as her husband's. A man who married, and moved to his wife's home in another community was deemed incapable of financially welcoming a woman into his own family, and was denigrated.

Things have changed as indicated by a sharp increase in the Yonthar Village population since the mid-2000s, the period when the price of *bu* quadrupled. Aware of the financial benefits of *bu*, many non-Yonthar people have sought to obtain a household registration in Yonthar Sumba to benefit from a share of the permit fees. Many Yonthar natives who had married and moved into other villages, tried to relocate their household registry to Yonthar, and succeeded in many cases. Women of other communities rushed to marry Yonthar men in order to obtain household registration in Yonthar Sumba. Men from other villages ignored traditional norms and began moving into their wives' homes in Yonthar Sumba. These efforts were all aimed at benefitting from the division of permit fees, as well as having the right to collect caterpillar fungus in Yonthar.

One day in late December of 2012, I visited a man who claimed that he had used his smart phone to take photos of snow leopards at the foot of a mountain near his home. I wanted to see the photos. His family lived in a small valley about ten kilometers from Tanwang's home. He was not home when I arrived. His daughter and son-in-law said that he was away in Jyegu that day. Nevertheless, I stayed for a cup of tea at the invitation of his son-in-law. The son-in-law was a man in his early twenties and originally from Nangchen County where Shugden deity worship is opposed and where contempt for Hashul natives who worship the deity is often

expressed. This man married a woman from Yonthar, currently holds Yonthar household registration, and receives a share of the permit fees. When I asked him what his family thought about his decision to marry a Hashul woman, he said, "My parents were conflicted. On the one hand, they worry that I might get bad luck from living in a Shugden area, but they also think I can get money here and live well. They let me decide."

"What do you think about it? How you feel?" I asked.

"I married my wife because we love each other. We are young and don't know much about religious issues. We care about our health and making money. Religious issues are not our concern," he explained.

Many people in Yonthar share his attitude. Because of the large number of people trying to obtain household registration in Yonthar, the local *bu* managers are worried that the increasing number of household registrations will decrease benefits, leading to conflict between Yonthar natives and those who have moved into the village through household registry change. The *bu* managers wanted to stop this "immigration," but were unsure how to proceed. They hoped it would peacefully solve itself.

## CHANGING LIFESTYLE

Though there has been a dramatic increase in the Yonthar Village population, most residents do not actually live locally. After selling their livestock, reaching agreement with their relatives to herd for them, or else hiring a herder from outside the area, they lived in Hashul Township seat or in Jyegu Town. They were rarely in Yonthar, except for the month-long *bu* collection season when they lived with their relatives, or lived in the home they had left. They collected *bu*

until they were given their share of the permit fees, and then left and did not return until the following year. Of 130 households, about half no longer lived in Yonthar, the result of education, resettlement policies, and the booming caterpillar fungus economy.

Since the mid-1990s, the government's various economic and ecological policies have encouraged herders to settle in towns and lead sedentary lives in permanent housing. For instance, the Sipeitao 'Four Allocations Policy' was implemented throughout herding areas of Qinghai Province to encourage sedentarization by subsidizing housing for local herders, shelters for livestock, fences for grazing land, and fodder for livestock to enhance their survival during times of heavy snowfall. The sedentarization process was further promoted in the mid-2000s when the Shengtai yimin 'Eco-resettlement Project' was introduced, ostensibly to solve the problem of grassland degradation, which was blamed on herders, who were alleged to overgraze. The herders were encouraged to reduce their livestock numbers or, better still, sell all their livestock and move into towns. In return the state promised the herders annual payments through *shengtai buchang* 'eco-compensation'. The households remaining on the grassland were encouraged to reduce their herd size so that the grassland could be restored. The amount of compensation was based on the size of the land a family owned at the time of the 1984 land privatization policy.

In the beginning, for about my first year in Hashul, I thought that this policy had achieved its goals. Most households in all four Hashul villages had resettled in towns and stopped herding, just as in Yonthar. However, as I spent more time in Yulshul and continued visiting families, I encountered the term *sarin* used by locals to refer to a certain amount of money they received from the government. *Sarin* literally means 'land fee' or 'payment for land'. I later realized this was actually eco-compensation. Most households I

visited thought that *sarin* was poverty alleviation. In other instances, it was interpreted differently. For instance, while I was in Nangchen County on a work trip, some local herders asked me about issues related to *sarin*. "Do you know why the government is giving us *sarin*?" one asked.

"Isn't that the payment for resettling and reducing herd size?" I said.

"There is a rumor that one day the government will say, 'We paid you enough *sarin* - you took the money, and now you need to give the land to us.' Maybe it's a plan to take the land away from us," he said, looking worried.

I had not heard this idea before. *Sarin* is actually a mistaken rendering of *shengtai buchang* 'eco-compensation', which was being interpreted to mean 'payment for land'. But there was more to this than just poor translation.

"In my community, we refused to take *sarin* because we don't want to give up our land in the future," the herder continued.

I explained that state policy makers maintained that the purpose of the payment was for reducing herds and resettling in towns.

The herdsman nodded and said nothing more and I made no further effort to convince him. I was unsure of how the future of the eco-compensation and resettlement would work out for local herders. After all, this is a time of unpredictable change on the Plateau.

After this conversation, I asked others what they thought about *sarin*. Shanshui had a collaborative research project with Michigan State University. In the summer of 2014, I led a team to conduct interviews as part of the project. We interviewed eighty households in Hashul and, except for a few village leaders, almost none of the villagers could explain why they were receiving *sarin*,

other than to say it was for poverty alleviation.

In December 2014, I conducted my own survey of fifty households in Zado County, and obtained similar results. It seemed no locals were familiar with the officially stated purpose of *sarin*. As I talked more with locals, I came to see a temporal overlap of eco-resettlement, the booming caterpillar fungus business, and the education policy known as Liangji gongjian 'Two Basic Constructions', a policy meant to eradicate illiteracy among illiterate villagers, and to ensure children attend primary and middle schools to complete nine-years of compulsory education.

The campaign to eradicate illiteracy meant that villagers were required to find educated people, and bring them to the local community to teach basic reading and writing in Tibetan and Chinese. Supposedly the township government would find the teachers and pay them. The village leaders would then organize illiterate villagers for classes with the teachers. However, this was often ignored. Instead, the government focused on the other "basic," which was to force local villagers to send their children to schools. If they did not, parents were fined up to 10,000 *yuan*, and after paying were still required to send the children to school. Most townships in Yulshul had a Tibetan primary school and some even had schools in their villages. However in the 2000s, most of these schools were closed on the grounds that the education quality and conditions were poor. In Hashul, as well as in Zado, the village primary schools were all closed by 2008. The government then poured money into township primary schools to make them more "advanced," both in terms of teaching and the school conditions. This meant parents had to send their children to township or county town seats for schooling. As one township governor in Yulshul told me, "You cannot force herders to resettle, but you can compel them to send their children to school, which will indirectly force them to resettle in towns."

Indeed, it was a very smart move to achieve policy aims. Forcing indigenous people to give up their native lands and resettle in towns is something that draws international attention and criticism, particularly in the context of Tibet's sensitive political status in the international community. However Tibetan, Chinese, and Western intellectuals all agree that children need to be educated and compulsory education is universally valued. Though the quality of education in rural schools is debatable, no one questions the merits of sending children to schools. However, in herding areas, sending children to schools means that fewer members of the family are available to care for the livestock. Boys and girls have traditionally played a key role in herding a family's livestock. With the children gone, families must reduce herd numbers. Furthermore, as parents constantly worry about the well-being of their children who live in distant boarding schools, many have given up village life and gone to live in those towns to be able to better care for their children. Among the fifty households that I surveyed in Zado, more than forty claimed that they moved to towns to care for children in school. However, all of this did not result in resettling the herders at a rate the government had hoped for.

I asked some Hashul villagers if sending children to schools was the main reason they moved to the township seat. When I asked Sangjyam, he said, "Yes, but it won't work without *bu*. Without *bu* we would starve to death in the township, because we don't have other income after we move. The money that the government gives is not enough to even buy coal during the cold winter. We are only able to live in towns and send children to school because of *bu*. I don't know how my family will be able to afford living here without *bu*."

Sangjyam, and many others I encountered, worried about the sustainability of *bu*. Traditionally Tibetan herders relied on livestock to support their livelihood, but now in many regions with *bu*,

people mainly relied on the *bu* economy. People constantly worried about price fluctuation and the size of the *bu* harvest every year. Governments did not provide programs such as vocational training for resettled herders. *Bu* is their sole source of income. When I asked families in Hashul and Zado what they would do if *bu* was no longer a resource in the near future, or its price fell dramatically, the answer was unanimous: "We would starve to death!" "We will have to beg."

## SERVANTS

With income from *bu*, resettling in towns was financially viable. Gradually, increasing numbers of families gave up herding and moved into towns to lead sedentary lives, where cash from *bu* supported them. Even the families who remained in the villages no longer herded livestock. With more cash, they retained only enough yaks, around twenty to thirty, to meet their own needs. In winter families would butcher a few yaks to make air-dried meat for consumption during the whole year. The other yaks were herded by *yogbo* that the families hired.

In the local dialect, *yogbo* means 'servant'. I was shocked when I first heard Tanwang say that his family had a *yogbo*, because the term also means 'slave'. As a boy attending state-run schools for ethnic minorities in Qinghai, I was taught that *yogbo* referred especially to servants of rich families prior to the establishment of the People's Republic.

In Yonthar Sumba most families have a *yogbo* who is hired to herd yaks. I met the *yogbo* employed by Tanwang's family. A Han Chinese from Haidong Region, he often stayed in a separate building near the livestock enclosure. *Yogbos* from neighboring areas also worked locally, for example, a Tibetan man from Rongbo Town and a

Tibetan man from Karze Prefecture, Sichuan Province. In fact, this Karze Tibetan's wife and their two children had also moved to Yonthar to herd for a family that had moved to Jyegu. They had left their livestock, grassland, and house, which the *yogbo* was hired to look after.

The *yogbos* of Yonthar generally received 1,500 *yuan* a month, which was about the same salary that waiters and waitresses earned working at small restaurants in Jyegu Town. The salary was not a particular attraction, but the possibility of *bu* was. During the *bu* season, Yonthar *yogbos* were required to pay only 1,500 *yuan* for a permit fee, the same as other Hashul villagers. The *yogbos* lived in Yonthar, waiting for the *bu* season that provided revenue like an annual bonus. This created quite a stir in Yonthar. The households that had moved to towns viewed this as an unfair arrangement. Most of them had no livestock so they could not hire *yogbos*. They told the village leaders that they wanted to hire nannies in towns to care for their children, and that the nannies would only need to be paid 1,500 *yuan* for a *bu* permit. Tanwang, as village leader, held several meetings regarding this issue, but it was unilaterally unsupported. His reasoning was that allowing families who still lived in the villages to hire *yogbos* made their life easier, thus encouraging them to remain in the village, instead of moving into towns. He feared that if such a nanny payment was introduced, all the locals would gradually move into towns, leaving their native community land without caretakers.

In fact, many local intellectuals and village elders worried about abandoned villages. They were anxious about local youths adopting the pop culture of the modern world and losing interest in village life. "We have been caring for this land for generations," said Tanwang's father, Mingyal, one day, "but youths now seem more interested in the outside world. They are not interested in herding.

I'm afraid that in a few years, no one will care for and protect this land."

He said this while kneading his prayer beads, as he often did. However, an even bigger worry was the sustainability of the *bu* economy. Local villagers often worry that *bu* will eventually vanish after years of collection. The concern about *bu*'s impermanency was constant.

"There are fewer *bu* every year!" a villager declared, echoing a sentiment I often heard. "There were so many *bu* in the past that you could collect a thousand in a day," he continued, "but now, even a good collector can find less than a hundred in a day. They are becoming fewer and fewer."

The price increase in *bu* has led to much more intense collection. The resource, if over harvested, could be depleted resulting in the earth-dwelling larva of the Thitarodes ghost moth with no fungus to parasitize and mummify the larva, and ultimately create caterpillar fungus. Another concern is that Chinese pharmaceutical companies have been attempting to create the chemical compounds found in caterpillar fungus. If they were successful, the price of *bu* would decrease. Locals constantly worry about *bu*. Given the lack of other significant income sources they feel that living in towns is only possible with a steady *bu* income and they know that it is an insecure way of life.

The Hashul Tibetans moving from herding to a *bu* based economy has led some educated Yulshul residents to conclude that, "*Bu* is the psychological opium of local Tibetans," meaning that *bu* is corrupting traditional values and nomadic lifestyle. They believe that the resource will be exhausted in the near future, and Yulshul locals who depend on *bu* for their livelihood will be unable to survive. One Yulshul Tibetan teacher who taught at a Tibetan middle school in Jyegu gave the following account about his students:

My students spend little time and energy on study, but they do spend a lot of time talking about fashion. They discuss who has the best clothes and phones. When I said that they should study hard to have a better future, one student stood and said, "Teacher, you went to school and studied hard for many years, but you are just a middle school teacher with a low salary. I can spend a month in the mountains collecting *bu* and my income from *bu* might be more than your total annual income. Why should we study hard? We have money and we don't need to study hard." I was speechless. My students do not study at all since they have a lot of money from *bu* collection.

The government provided no support for resettled herders to find alternative economic means, being interested only in resettling them. Maybe the policy makers hoped that the next generation of these herders who were attending schools would transform their lives through higher education, which would provide them means for a livelihood. A township leader in Zado told me, "Children are receiving a fake education," pointing out that the nine-year compulsory education is supposed to "enhance" the knowledge of the students. In reality, however, this education is unable to provide practical job opportunities, particularly with the extremely limited employment choices in Tibetan areas.

## MINING THREATS

Land is both native homeland and source of livelihood for Yonthar people. They value their land and its resources, and worry that outsiders will not see and value the land as they do. They worry about potential threats that might destroy their native homes and livelihood. One night, my colleagues from Shanshui and I met with the twelve-member *bu* management team. The village Party Secretary

spoke first:

This past summer, mining prospectors came here. We do not know if they found anything, but we are worried. Our land is precious, and there must be valuable metals underneath. We are afraid that if the miners discover precious metals, they will start digging and destroy the environment here.

"Mining will destroy Yonthar. It will anger the deities, and calamities will befall us," Tanwang added.

"What can we do to stop them? Do you have suggestions?" the Party Secretary asked.

This was an issue that I encountered every time I gathered with villagers. No matter what the topic - waste management, wildlife, or whatever, someone inevitably brought up the mining threat issues. We knew about the prospecting that summer. The prospectors were not from mining companies, but were personnel from the Qinghai Provincial Ministry of Land and Resources. As part of state policy, the Ministry of Land and Resources was required to search for potential resources and give a "valuation" of the land in monetary terms. We explained this at the meeting. The response was immediate and unanimous.

"What's the difference? If they discover precious metals, they will dig them up," one man said. This was the common response. This level of mistrust of government is prevalent. In many cases, the locals are correct. Yulshul natives often provide evidence of mining activities in the Yulshul area, mostly operated by companies with strong ties to powerful officials.

Whenever the issue of mining arises, we, as conservation NGOs, are in a difficult position, because there is no easy answer, and no easy solution. Throughout China, there are cases of conflicts between miners and locals. We do not want to play a role that puts

local villagers in danger of conflict. We often encourage villagers to seek "legal and scientific means" to resolve issues. Sometimes I feel ashamed making such suggestions. What does 'legal' mean when mining company profits and the powerful state officials and interest groups behind the mining companies feel threatened? I was lucky to be in Hashul where while no mining efforts seemed eminent, locals were trying to prepare for a possible future "battle."

As members of Shanshui, we suggested the one thing we were able to do reasonably well: study the local ecology. We told the Party Secretary that we could do ecological research on Yonthar together and then make a clear case for the significance of Yonthar's ecological value over its mining value. After all, the entire Yulshul Prefecture area is within the National Sanjiangyuan Nature Reserve, and part of Yonthar is within one of the eighteen core zones<sup>15</sup> within the reserve. By and large, miners cannot touch it. Yonthar has rich biodiversity and is a main habitat for the snow leopard, a first level protected wild animal of China. We thought that we could at least publicize the region's biodiversity significance, using snow leopards as an example. I was skeptical about its effectiveness when faced with the potential financial value of mining that government officials held dear. Nevertheless, I thought we could try. Few good choices present themselves where mining is concerned.

## THE CONSERVATION TEAM

We encouraged the village leaders to formally establish a community level conservation team to conduct ecological monitoring of wildlife

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<sup>15</sup> The National Sanjiangyuan Nature Reserve has eighteen zones, each of which has crucial ecological value. From a legal standpoint, no activities such as mining and dam construction are allowed within these core zones.

in Yonthar. The leaders chose *bu* managers, and other villagers interested in conservation work. Over the next several years, scientists at Shanshui provided training and monitoring tools to the village conservation team, which collected the data. This included photos of different species, their population numbers, and so on. Scientists at Shanshui then analyzed the data and gave feedback to villagers, and compiled files and reports as evidence of the region's ecological significance. We hoped that such methods and findings would help persuade policy makers that the region's ecological value far outweighed its mining value.

One day, I followed a conservation team member to observe how he did his monitoring work. Tsenor monitored blue sheep and snow leopards. He was not very talkative. He had not attended school and knew only basic Tibetan reading and writing, learned from other villagers. When I tried to start a conversation, he seemed shy, declaring, "I didn't go to school. I don't know. You should ask others." He made a point of his lack of formal education whenever I tried to interact with him, even when I emphasized the importance of his experiences and traditional knowledge of the landscape of Yonthar. After some time, we stopped at the house of one of his relatives to have tea. The elder in the family jokingly asked, "How are you able to do such work when you even didn't attend school?" punctuated by a big smile.

Tsenor seemed embarrassed, smiled back, and sipped the tea, saying nothing.

"So tell me, what are you doing? Tell me about your work," the family elder insisted.

Tsenor put down his bowl of tea on the table and explained enthusiastically while gesturing:

Our village is located at the heart of a national level nature reserve, but poaching and illegal mining threats continue. Blue sheep are the main

food for snow leopards, which are national level, class one, protected animals. Rich blue sheep populations in our community ensure that snow leopards live in this region, which thus becomes the habitat of a national level protected animal. With snow leopards here, we can tell illegal miners and poachers that this is the habitat of snow leopards, and use the law to protect our home community and animals on this land.

I was glad to hear this. This was the kind of influence we hoped to exert by supporting locals to conduct biodiversity monitoring work. It would be hard to say that this would be effective in a future mining context, but this was one way we thought we could try. Yonthar's conservation team continued their biodiversity monitoring work. Sometimes they felt it was tedious, but they wanted to continue.

"It's worth doing if it really helps protect our land," most replied when I asked if they wished to stop doing it.

In the summer of 2013, Shanshui supported Yonthar villagers to set up a plastic waste management program to get rid of plastic waste, which was so widespread that it worried the villagers. Locals thought that the plastic waste on the grassland might make it "un-inhabitable" for caterpillar fungus, and thus felt an urgent need to address the problem. According to their explanations, plastic waste was causing many worms and insects that lived in garbage to die and thus reasoned that it might also cause caterpillar fungus to die. In addition yaks that ate plastic were dying. Several garbage rooms were built to store plastic waste. Once these garbage rooms were full, the village conservation team hired a truck to transport the waste to a landfill in Jyegu. The transportation cost of plastic waste from Yonthar to Jyegu cost around 1,500 *yuan* a month. Though expensive, the villagers thought it was worthwhile if it kept their homeland clean of waste and prevented garbage related calamities.

The conservation team members conducted regular patrols of the village border regions and areas where they monitored the

dense wildlife population. In some cases, they found abandoned motorcycles and poachers' traps. Though they had not encountered a hunter, they believed that their monitoring and regular patrols discouraged hunters from harming wildlife.

In the summer of 2013, Tanwang filmed three snow leopards on a mountain near his home. Later when I met him, he was extremely excited:

In the past, we heard from different sources that there were snow leopards here, but I never saw for myself. However, we saw three snow leopards this time. The filming took more than an hour! This is Golo Gyalbo's (local mountain deity) expression of joy! In the past, even though we didn't harm wildlife, we still didn't take formal conservation action to protect wildlife, and we didn't undertake thorough waste management work. Now that we are doing all this, the mountain deity is pleased with our work. He is happy so he let us see snow leopards to reward us.

Locals are concerned to protect the environment, which is the source of their livelihood, as well as the source of their spiritual wellbeing. Their connection with their surroundings is such that there is no way to talk about one aspect without involving other aspects. It is all interconnected. Conserving local nature means protecting people's livelihoods and cultural practices. National Sanjiangyuan Nature Reserve is about 390,000 square kilometers in area. The Sanjiangyuan Management Office responsible for the conservation of this reserve is short-staffed with only a few dozen full-time employees. What if local Tibetan herders did not live here? Who would protect the wildlife from poachers? Who would be willing to do everything in their power to stop mining companies from destroying this ecologically crucial region?

Yonthar Village (Tsering Bum, 2009).



Tanwang's family house (Tsering Bum, 2015).



Caterpillar fungus collectors in Yonthar (Tsering Bum, 2014).



Tents of caterpillar fungus collectors in Yonthar in 2014 (Tsering Bum, 2014).



Shanshui staff training Yonthar's conservation team on wildlife monitoring (Tsering Bum, 2012).



Yonthar conservation team members making a wildlife conservation plan (Tsiring Bum, 2012).



A room for recyclable garbage in Yonthar (Tsering Bum, 2013).



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## GRAZING LAND

### THE "POOREST" VILLAGE

**B**y 2013, Shanshui was planning to expand work into other villages in Hashul because the township Party Secretary, a local Yulshul Tibetan named Sheray Gyaltso, was a wildlife enthusiast and had supported our work from the beginning. He urged us to work in other villages. "As the leader of Hashul, I have to be fair to all the villages," he said, "I'm afraid that people of other villages will be unhappy and scold me if you only focus on Yonthar."

We agreed. For NGOs working in Tibetan areas, healthy relationships with the local government were paramount. Work often went well when we had local government support. Our capacity in terms of human resources and finances was limited. Our main objective was to create innovative, locally-feasible conservation strategies with the hope that the government would use their human and financial resources to expand these programs, thus it was crucial to have local government supporters. As an NGO, we could focus our work only on specific, limited regions, and offer policy recommendations based on our research and project implementation in communities, hoping that our examples would push the government to change its ecological policies. For this reason we strove to maintain good relations with local governments. We reported our plans to the township government, listened to their advice, submitted reports when we finished some work, and sometimes invited township employees to participate in our efforts to help them understand that we were operating legally. Our close

contact with Hashul Township leaders pleased them. They always supported our work. Another reason for expanding the work to other villages was that the leaders of other villages had learnt about our ecological monitoring in Yonthar, and wanted us to support them to establish village-based conservation groups. I later learned that this was due to their worries about potential mining in their own territories. They were afraid that with Yonthar better "equipped" to resist mining, others would be left more vulnerable to mining threats. They thought that we, an NGO of many non-Hashul people, were in a position to help them resist mining operations. Are conservation NGOs in China in any real position of power to solve such issues? We could assist them in establishing conservation organizations, conduct research to "increase" the ecological values of the region and hope that villagers would work to empower themselves in the process. Luckily, Hashul was not facing any immediate mining threats, which gave us time and space to "get ready."

At a staff meeting with Shanshui's Qinghai program team, I suggested that, as part of the expansion plan, I would choose another village in Hashul to work by myself. The higher management level immediately approved the proposal. I thought three Hashul project team members living in just one village in Yonthar was a waste of resources. Instead, we could work separately in different villages. As a trilingual Tibetan, I was often asked to translate, which I disliked. It was tedious, consumed much of my time, and left me little time to work and learn about community life independently. I believed that I could do more and better work if I worked alone. Subsequently, it was decided that after the New Year period, I would return to Hashul and survey the other Hashul communities, and choose one to work closely with. Optimistic about this plan, I returned to Hashul in March of 2013 after spending Tibetan New Year at my parents' home.

I came to Ganyi first, the community known as the

"poorest" of all Hashul villages. Ganyi borders Yonthar to the north, Gomri Village to the east and south, and Drido County in the west. It is about a two hour drive from Hashul Township seat. The location of Ganyi is unique compared to other Hashul communities because it is located on both sides of a provincial level major road connecting Drido County with Jyegu Town. When I visited Ganyi, I was struck by the freezing weather, which was due to the openness of the landscape and the wind blowing constantly from the Plateau.

The township Party Secretary introduced me to Kadra, the Ganyi community leader, and I stayed at his home. Kadra was in his mid-forties. He tied his long hair at the back of his head, a traditional hairstyle local Tibetans maintained. I did not see any young people with such hairstyles.

Kadra's home was a government-built house, the result of the Four Allocations Program. His home was right by the major road to Drido on his own grazing land, so he could make use of the house and maintain his yaks on the grazing land.

His married nineteen year old son lived next to him, along with his wife and two year old son. After dropping out of junior middle school in Jyegu, the son had returned home and married.

Kadra's twenty year old daughter had married a man from another village a year earlier. She had a son and lived with her husband's family. Kadra thus had two grandchildren.

Kadra's wife was a quiet, compassionate woman. Like Tsamyang Tso, she was in charge of the household chores. Kadra's family did not have hydro-powered electricity of their own. Instead, they used a solar panel to charge a battery from a broken motorcycle. At night, the battery powered light bulbs in the house. I did not know how to turn it on and off during my first night at his home. Kadra showed me how he had re-engineered the battery and how to turn it on and off.

On my second day there, Kadra called the three natural village leaders of Ganyi and the village Party Secretary to his home to introduce me. Unlike Yonthar, Ganyi had no clear administrative distinctions between the natural villages. Ganyi consisted of three natural villages and each had a leader who answered to Kadra and the village Party Secretary. There were seven to ten separate *tsochong* 'teams' under each village, which consisted of roughly five to ten households. There were a total of twenty-seven teams in the three natural villages. Each had a team leader. The economic and environmental conditions of each village were similar. Unlike Yonthar, necessity did not dictate that they divide the village in order to protect natural resources. Ganyi did not have caterpillar fungus on their grazing land.

In order to better understand the village situation before visiting each family, I asked the village leaders to help me with something that I often did with key informants when I visited an unfamiliar community. We collectively prepared a resource map of the village, indicating location of houses, population, major mountains, rivers, wild animal habitats, and other resources; a seasonal calendar of major events in the village; and a list of issues that the community was facing and planning to solve. Next, I would visit individual households to verify the information and see what ordinary residents thought and planned to do. To do this, Kadra helped me rent a minivan from Ganyi. The driver was familiar with the area, and took me to the households.

The minivans seen in Yulshul area are vehicles that seat seven people. They cost around 50,000 *yuan*, much less than the all-terrain cars in Yonthar, but more expensive than motorcycles. Such minivans are common in Yulshul herding communities because more people and goods can be transported when visiting Jyegu or neighboring towns to make purchases. Ganyi had few minivans. The

motorized transportation for most villagers was motorcycles. The economic situation of the different villages was obvious from the types of vehicles they used. Yonhar was the richest of the four villages in Hashul and most families had all-terrain vehicles. Ganyi was the poorest and most families owned only motorcycles, whereas the other two villages were "middle class" in Hashul with most families owning minivans.

Three decades ago, local herders lived within a subsistence economy. Horses and yaks were their main means of transportation. However, now as they engaged in a market economy fueled by *bu*, sharp differences quickly emerged in their standard of living.

## BAD LAND

Ganyi residents were well aware of their relative poverty, and often blamed their grassland for *yagbo mida* 'being bad' 'being not good', and lacking natural resources such as caterpillar fungus. When asked the reasons for being bad, the answers provided by most villagers were the same, "Because of the *sanag* 'black soil', pikas,<sup>16</sup> and *bunag*<sup>17</sup> 'black worms'." Jamga gave me the following account when I talked to him.

In the past, our grazing land was good. We had sheep and more yaks than today, and the grass was enough. That's because there was more

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<sup>16</sup> A pika is a small rodent mammal with short limbs, round body and ears, and there is no external tail. On the Tibetan Plateau, it lives in burrows on alpine grassland and feeds on grass.

<sup>17</sup> *Bunag* 'black worms' are also known as grassland caterpillars. They are generally considered pests because they feed on high quality forages, thus damaging alpine meadows and leading to a shortage of food for livestock and wild herbivores.

grass on the land. The grass was tall and more nutritious. It was so tall that when sheep went into the grass, they were hidden. But now the grass is bad. The grass is short and there are more pikas and black worms now. Pikas were not a problem in the past. There were few of them, but there are more and more of them now. They destroy the grassland by digging many holes, and black worms eat a lot of grass so the livestock don't have enough grass to eat. The land is turning into black soil because of pikas.

Hashul elders often compared the time before the 1950s and the present when they talked about the grassland. When asked specifically, they referred to the pre-1950 tribal periods. Most elders I consulted were in their sixties and seventies. Though they often lacked personal experience of this past, their accounts were drawn from what their forebears had told them.

Ganyi locals' concept of bad land included the lack of caterpillar fungus, grazing land degradation, and limited wildlife diversity. When I asked local leaders what kind of wildlife their territory had, they indicated snow leopards, musk deer, and white-lipped deer, the same wildlife that Yonthar Village still had. However, when we drew the village resource map, the habitats of all those animals were in border areas with Yonthar and Gomri villages. When I pointed this out, the village Party Secretary lamented, "Our village land only has pikas and black worms! This land is so bad, it won't even support wildlife!"

For Kadra, "bad land" was exactly what he was worried about when it came to protecting their land from miners. "We are afraid that the government will tell us that our land is worthless since it does have good grass and doesn't support wildlife," Kadra said. "Then they might say that because it is worthless, they will mine here. This is what we fear."

"Even though this land is bad, it's our home," Chenglay, the

leader of the second natural village said. "Our villagers will starve to death if our land is destroyed. This is why we need support to protect the grassland and wildlife. We hope that if our land improves through conservation, the government will say that it's good land, and won't let the miners come in."

## Grazing History

Based on local elders' narratives and miscellaneous accounts from historical documents about Hashul's tribal history, I was told that Hashul was a tribe prior to the 1950s. Ganyi elders tell stories heard from their parents and grandparents of herding in the tribal period. One elder, Nyiga, said:

During the tribal era, there were no separate villages in Hashul. All Hashul lived as one community. They had one tsobon 'tribal leader' and many small leaders. They had thousands of yaks, sheep, and horses, and nomadicized within the Hashul boundaries, moving between spring, summer, autumn, and winter pastures. They moved at least four times a year as decided by the tribal leaders. After the grass in an area was nearly depleted, a meeting was held and an auspicious day was chosen to move to another location. Everyone was expected to move, and everyone had to obey.

This account briefly summarizes herding management practice during the tribal era. It indicates a high degree of mobility in terms of herding practices in Hashul, with no regional restrictions, since Hashul was considered a collective whole consisting of various families rather than different communities. Hashul residents now move only between winter and summer pasture within the boundaries of their own natural villages, and many residents lead completely sedentary lives. Statistics regarding livestock number

during the tribal time are unclear. Local elders claimed that there were "thousands." Tibetan written sources of history often exclude the history of local nomads, not to mention livestock statistics. Wherever I travelled in Yulshul, the unilateral answer always was "there were more livestock in the tribal era than in the post-tribal era." One reason for this was that in recent decades Yulshul experienced several major snow disasters, and several times the local livestock nearly all died. In the post snow disaster relief of 1985 livestock were "imported" from neighboring regions such as Golok and Karze.

These herding practices changed in the early 1950s after the tribal system was eliminated under PRC administration. Hashul Township was established and the original tribal land and people were divided into four administrative villages. When Ganyi became a separate community, three natural villages were established under Ganyi. Each consisted of several production teams with a total of twenty-seven teams in the three natural villages. Each team consisted of five to ten households then. People's communes were established throughout Hashul villages, and livestock were divided among production teams. Each team was assigned a specific section of grassland and expected to herd on their assigned land. The total land size of Ganyi was about 300 square kilometers, which was divided into twenty-seven sections. Households in every team divided the workload and took turns herding. Local herders were expected to raise as many yaks and sheep as possible in order to meet the people's commune's production quota. Even though the grazing land was divided, livestock still occasionally moved between the lands. Grazing land was not fenced till the 1990s.

After the dissolution of people's communes in the early 1980s, property reforms were implemented in Hashul in 1984. Property was privatized to the extent that land was still held as state

property, but livestock was divided among household members. Everyone in Ganyi was allocated twelve yaks and twenty-seven sheep at that time. Families continued to herd livestock on the grazing land assigned to their production team. After receiving their share of livestock they no longer herded collectively. Instead, individual families herded livestock on their own, although they shared the land with other team member families. By 1994, another major change came that further privatized land use per household. Each household was assigned a specifically measured piece of land and metal fencing was given to families to encourage them to fence the land. The official reason was that local herders' lives would be easier with livestock behind fences, where they were require less care. Nevertheless, fencing was not enforced at the community level and thus it had little effect. However, this all changed dramatically in the mid-2000s when the government encouraged locals to reduce herd size and protect the grassland in a program called Tuimu huancao 'returning land to grass'. Locals were again encouraged to fence their grazing land at this time.

In Ganyi in 2006, each household was given thirty rolls of metal fencing. Each roll was one hundred meters long. This commonly resulted in fencing off land between teams, although there were cases where families fenced off the land for their own family. Families also fenced small land allotments next to their houses to be used for younger yaks and old, toothless yaks during snow disasters and spring when the livestock did not have adequate grass. Fencing was given every year afterwards, and seemed to have achieved its purpose. In fact it was so successful, that no land could be further fenced in the Hashul area. For instance, in 2013 when the township government provided fencing to Yonthar Village to be divided among households, the villagers had no use for it since all their land was already fenced. They then sold the fencing back to the factory that

manufactured the fences. Villagers said this cycle continued for several years. The government bought fencing from the manufacturer, and gave it to the local villagers who, having no use for it, sold it back to the manufacturer. This cycle continues.

## WHY WE HAVE BAD LAND

Ganyi villagers often complained about their livelihood conditions by comparing their life to that of Yonthar Sumba. "Yonthar has everything! We have nothing!" they often said. They did not have *bu*, and their grazing land was inferior to that of Yonthar and other villages. They had more black soil, more pikas, and more black worms that ate grass and infected yaks with a mouth disease when they ate the worms while grazing. This disease caused the yaks' tongues and lips to crack and their teeth to fall out. Furthermore, black worms ate much of the grass before the yaks could eat it. Yaks did not have enough grass so most families needed to move from their summer to the winter pasture months too early, with the result that the winter pasture was soon depleted leaving the yaks little to eat. As the yaks lost weight, they became more vulnerable to snow disasters. For instance, there was a snow disaster in Hashul in late February of 2013. While few yaks died in neighboring villages, Ganyi lost more than one hundred yaks.

Policy makers often blame grassland degradation on overgrazing by the local herders. Ganyi herders disagree, pointing out that they reduced their livestock number in the mid-2000s when the state initiated resettlement. Like Yonthar, many Ganyi herders abandoned herding because of education policies. By 2006 the villagers had sold all their sheep, reduced their yak numbers, and fenced the land. By 2013, the village owned only 6,000 yaks on 300

square kilometers of land. Still, the locals felt they were experiencing the worst grassland condition in history.

"It's because we sold off all the sheep, and fenced the land," Chenglay, the head of the second natural village, told me. When I asked him to elaborate, he said:

The increase in pikas and black worms and the expanding areas of black soil happened quickly after we sold all the sheep and fenced the land. These factors are all interrelated. We often talk about this in the village. We think that sheep are good for the soil and sheep also kill black worms. Sheep produce a lot of dung. Sheep pellets are small and can spread all over the land as sheep move fast on the land. Their pellets fertilize the soil and thus grass grows better. Sheep also step on black worms when they walk across the grassland. That's why black worms couldn't multiply in the past. Now, without sheep, black worms multiply quickly, and the soil has lost important fertilizer. That's why the land is deteriorating!

Kadra was present as Chenglay was telling me this and added:

Now the grassland is fenced and yaks can only move in a limited area. They circle their small plot of land again and again. Though the grass is all eaten down, they still walk, stepping on the land, resulting in further deterioration to the grassland, which does not have enough time to recover. It easily becomes black soil and pikas then come and it becomes worse. These are all connected.

Not much thorough ecological research has been done on these issues. However, locals' ecological knowledge based on observation and experience points out crucial problems with grassland policies.

I was impressed by Kadra's and Chenglay's perspectives and their holistic approach to the interconnectedness of environment and lifestyle. I hoped government policy makers would learn from

these local herders and try to see the interconnections in the local ecosystem, otherwise their top-down approach to decision making would often not solve problems, but instead, create new ones.

I was interested in their account of the consequences of selling the sheep. Whenever I asked a villager why they sold all their sheep, not their yaks, the answer was generally the same: "Sheep are hard to raise. They eat a lot and move around a lot. We must always keep an eye on them. They are also more vulnerable to predators such as wolves and bears."

This was convincing, especially with the Two Basic Construction education policy that had reduced labor power. Another suggestion was that sheep were inferior when compared to yaks. Sheep were sold for mutton, sheep wool, and skins for cash. Yaks produce much more than meat. Yak milk is consumed regularly in herding areas, as is dried cheese, butter, and yogurt. Yak dung is used as fuel and yak hair was traditionally used to make the black tents in the areas where herders lived before they moved into houses. Yak met more of the herders' needs than sheep.

## PIKA POISONING

If there was any agreement between the government and local herders about grassland degradation, it was that pikas were to blame. The government blamed pikas for destroying the grassland by creating burrows that cause soil erosion and also blamed the local herders for overgrazing and thereby contributing to grassland degradation. Most herders I talked to never agreed that overgrazing was an issue, but they did blame pikas for soil degradation. They also claimed that pikas were a recent problem - they had not been a problem in the past. To deal with the perceived pika problem, the

government spent billions of *yuan* to produce chemical poisons to kill the pikas. Initially, from 2005 for the next ten years, about 1.57 billion *yuan* was spent on pika poisoning, euphemistically termed "ecological conservation," in the first phase of the Sanjiangyuan Program in Qinghai. In 2014 when the second phase began, the grant for poisoning had increased to 6.5 billion *yuan* for the next five years.

The history of state-sponsored pika poisoning can be traced back to the 1950s, but it was not until 2000s that it was implemented on a large scale. Qinghai Provincial TV periodically broadcast images of herders in Qinghai poisoning major pika habitat on the grassland. The religious views of many local Tibetans in many areas of Qinghai led them to abandon the poisoning project. Many local herders maintain that poisoning is immoral and refuse to participate in killing pikas. At the same time, however, they view pikas as horrible pests. In the end, the government hired Han Chinese to come to the grassland and poison the pikas.

Local Tibetan herders lived a life of contradictions in situations like this. While considering the pika to be a pest that needs eradication, the guilt they feel as a result of their religious beliefs prevents them taking this action themselves. The solution then requires the participation of a third party who holds a different cultural perspective, and who economically benefits from their participation.

Pika poisoning has continued for the past decade, but with minimal success. Kadra, the village leader, has views that mirror those of many locals I encountered in Yulshul:

Poisoning is not working at all! Pikas reproduce fast. You kill one pika and next year there are just more and more. Poison kills those animals that eat pikas, like eagles, foxes, wolves, and other animals. These animals eat poisoned, dead pika and then they die from the poison in the pikas. By next year, there are few of those animals left to prey on

pikas, so pikas increase in numbers because there are fewer predators. Of course pika killing should continue, but methods should be used that don't harm other animals. They should be killed off once and for all so that they can't reproduce and increase in numbers.

His accounts were often validated by experiences of Yulshul herders in other areas. When I visited Tsochi Village in Chumarleb County, northwest of Hashul, the locals had not implemented the poisoning project because of pressure from a lama in the local village monastery. He maintained that poisoning these little creatures was cruel and not a Buddhist approach to life. Villagers agreed and decided to not participate in the poisoning program, though neighboring communities did participate. Two years later, Tsochi villagers found that the villages that had participated in poisoning program had more pikas than their own village. They felt that this was because their village had more foxes than the neighboring communities and they were very proud of the situation of their own village.

Pika poisoning is contested both in China's scientific community and among Tibetan intellectuals and religious institutions. Some Western scientists hold that the pika is an important component of the ecological food chain of the Tibetan Plateau.<sup>18</sup> More than thirty predators feed on pikas and might very well become extinct on the Plateau as a result of the pika poison, or from lack of future prey if pikas are eradicated, as the government hopes. The extinction of these thirty species on the Plateau could negatively impact the entire Plateau ecosystem to a great extent. Furthermore, scientists believe that pikas play a major role in maintaining Plateau soil health by burrowing, thus creating soft earth that is good for

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<sup>18</sup> Smith, Andrew T and JM Foggin. 1999. The Plateau Pika (*Ochotona curzoniae*) is a Keystone Species for Biodiversity on the Tibetan Plateau. *Animal Conservation* 2:235-240.

plants. Most of these views and studies are provisional and ongoing without conclusive results, but they still strongly suggest that poisoning and eradicating a species could have catastrophic consequences.

Many Tibetan religious leaders I interacted with said that even if a species such as the pika did negatively impact the ecosystem, they should not be killed off for the sake of human wellbeing. This, together with the fact that pikas have lived with humans on the Plateau for thousands of years, led them to argue that this was a normal part of the life cycle, and it would all eventually turn out fine if largely ignored. While easy to say, the local herders I encountered in Yulshul faced this issue in their daily life and felt that it needed to be resolved quickly.

Due to the importance of pikas in maintaining the ecosystem balance, I was dismayed by the government's decision to increase the pika poisoning budget in 2014. Many decision makers may have been aware that killing pikas is a mistake, but the financial incentives promised by pika poisoning program makes it attractive.

In contrast to pikas, there was little to no research done on the black worm issue on the Tibetan Plateau. Nevertheless, the approach was also to poison them. Every summer, the local government sent in people to spray liquid poison on grassland infested with the black worms. "It works for the first year, but the next year the same number of black worms will appear again," one Ganyi resident told me. His house was located in a place with enormous numbers of black worms. I visited him in July 2013, and the ground was covered with the worms. As I walked toward his house with a colleague, we tried not to step on the worms. My colleague was in front of me and walked as if trying to avoid landmines. I assumed that I was walking in the same way.

## TOO LITTLE GRASS

Different factors combine to cause grassland degradation, creating what Ganyi residents cared about most: *tsa dang mi da* 'not enough grass'. Herders' livelihood depended on the livestock. Insufficient grass for their livestock threatened their existence. In three cases that I encountered through interviews, the historical practice of families herding together as a team collapsed due to "tragedy of the commons" and conflicts over grass. For instance, in the second natural village team, one family was accused by the others of having too many yaks on their shared grazing land. The other families thought that they already had too little grass. A single family with more than seventy yaks was blamed for creating a situation where there was not enough grass for the whole team.

A disagreement followed, and the family with more than seventy yaks decided to leave the team and live on their own. They fenced their own assigned piece of grassland while the other team members continued to share the rest of the land. However, during my entire period of interaction with Ganyi residents, I encountered only three such cases. My experiences in Ganyi also suggested that local villagers were reluctant to discuss disputes between families, considering it unethical to share information about such family matters. I never pressed anyone to talk about such issues, but occasionally people volunteered their own stories when conversations led in that direction. I did though, ask some villagers if there were more disputes over grass among other families. Most replied that they could not raise more yaks even if they wanted to, because the grassland was too degraded. More yaks would mean all yaks having too little to forage on causing all to become weak and vulnerable to snow disasters in the winter, and in the spring period when the winter grass had gone and the summer grass had not yet appeared.

"We must raise fewer yaks to ensure that the yaks have enough grass to eat," Samgyal said. "This way the yaks will become strong and fat, and produce more milk and therefore more butter. The meat will also be fat. Strong yaks resist snow disasters while weak yaks cannot. What's the point of raising more yaks when the land cannot support them? We herders know this well, and do things accordingly, but many outsiders don't trust our knowledge. They always accuse us of causing grassland degradation."

#### GANYI CONSERVATION GROUP

The concept of bad land and the fear of future potential mining operations in the village pushed Ganyi villagers to establish a village conservation group. This consisted of twenty-two members, including the Ganyi Village leader, the village Party Secretary, the heads of three natural villages, fifteen ordinary villagers, and two monks from Hashul Monastery whose natal home was in Ganyi. The two monks were consultants. The members of the conservation group had clear plans and visions for their future work. They wanted to conduct work in waste management, economic development, and education in environmental laws and policies. Each of these three fields is a response to a specific issue in Ganyi they wanted to resolve.

#### *LAJI*

Less than three decades ago, Hashul villagers led a subsistence existence in which all the "waste" produced was disposed of locally without affecting the environment. However, with the emergence of a market economy, many packaged goods ranging from plastic

packaged noodles to soda bottles and cans appeared locally. This trash is thrown out of the houses on the grassland and does not decompose. Some livestock ate trash and died. Slowly, local villagers realized that these new forms of waste should not be thrown out to decompose because it was bad for the grassland and their livestock. In the absence of a Tibetan term for waste that does not decompose, Hashul villagers called this new plastic waste *laji*, a Chinese term meaning garbage. Located along a major road, Ganyi was particularly vulnerable to *laji*. Travelers between Jyegu and Drido often tossed plastic bottles and packages out of their vehicles as they sped by, adding to the plastic waste.

In 2014, Shanshui tried to work with recyclers in Yulshul to recycle plastic waste in all of Yulshul Prefecture, but the result was disappointing. Herding communities are often far from major towns and transportation fees cost more than the recycling income. The only way it might work is perhaps through state subsidies of transportation fees between Yulshul and Ziling.

Unlike Yonthar, Ganyi lacks the economic means to regularly transport plastic waste from their village to the landfill in Jyegu. They decided instead to collect plastic waste and burn it twice every year. The conservation group decided to organize other locals in April and October of every year to do this. When I asked why they did not choose a summer month when the rivers were not frozen and it was easy to collect plastic waste, a conservation group member said:

In April, the land and rivers are not frozen solid. But at the same time, worms and insects in the water and on the land are not awake. It is the same in October. The worms and insects have gone to sleep by that time. We won't hurt these creatures if we collect plastic waste in April and October. It would be easy in the summer, but we will injure many small creatures that live among plastic waste.

Tsandan gave the following account for choosing to burn

the plastic waste when I asked him why they did not bury it:

We want to transport it to Jyegu to sell, but we are poor and don't have the money to do that every month. Burying the waste here on our grassland is bad for the soil and bad for the growth of grass. It would rob the grass of nutrition. Plus, the earth deities will be angered if plastic waste is buried. They will be wrathful and incite catastrophes. Burning is bad for the air and will also anger the deities, but we really have no good choices. What can we do? We have to deal with this and we thought burning is relatively less harmful. I wish we had money like Yonthar so we could also transport the plastic waste somewhere else.

#### CO-OPS

Ganyi planned to develop the local economy because they wanted alternatives to herding if villagers were to live well.

"We want to be rich like Yonthar," the village Party Secretary said. "But we don't have *bu* like they do, so we have to do business - get rich through business."

They hoped that the conservation group would take charge in registering a co-op selling such livestock products as milk and butter in Jyegu markets, and open a shop to sell grain, wheat flour, and utensils directly transported from Ziling to their community. Most families in Ganyi did not have the necessary transportation vehicles and labor power to transport yak products to Jyegu to sell, so the co-op was to take charge of collecting products, and take them to Jyegu to sell. This was intended to increase the villagers' income. As Kadra explained, transporting products directly from Ziling to the village would ensure product quality, and allow much cheaper purchases. They did not plan to increase prices other than what was needed to cover transportation costs. By providing cheaper and better quality products they would be able to help the villagers.

Provincial Ministry of Land and Resources staff came to Ganyi when they inspected Yonthar for mining resources. The locals felt threatened, and responded in the same way as the Yonthar villagers: "If they find precious metals, they will dig them up." They felt so threatened that they did not want anyone associated with mining companies in the community. In the summer of 2013, I was with several colleagues in Ganyi to investigate local grassland conditions. By coincidence, we were driving a car that, later the villagers told us, resembled the one the mine inspectors were driving. As we passed through a valley, we suddenly realized several motorcycles were following us. We stopped by the road to greet them. One man came up, peered into the car through the window, and recognized me. He was the leader of the third natural village and also a member of the conservation group.

"Your car looks very similar to the car owned by those miners," he said, with a relieved smile.

"Is that why you all came?" I asked. By this time, there were more motorcycles around us. Most of the drivers were members of the conservation group.

"Yes, a villager phoned me and said that miners were in the village, so I called them to come. It's good that you aren't miners," he said.

"What did you plan to do if we had been miners?" I asked.

He paused and then said, "Beat you, confiscate your car, and then let you walk back to where you had come from."

I was not shocked by his answer. I had heard this sort of reaction many times before. But I was glad that they had not encountered miners this day. If they had followed their plan, I was sure that the result would not have been in their favor. There were

cases of confrontations between local Tibetans and miners, which ended with the locals jailed.

Village leaders understood that they were at a disadvantage in any violent confrontation with miners. For that reason, they wanted to pursue legal measures and educate the community members about environmental policies and laws regarding the Yulshul area, and thus prevent mining altogether. While appreciating their reasoning and efforts, I worried about its effectiveness. From an ecological standpoint, the biodiversity of Ganyi was very low compared to that of Yonthar. Ganyi had little nationally protected wildlife, other than in border areas near Yonthar. It was also not within one of the eighteen core zones of the National Sanjiangyuan Nature Reserve. It would be hard to play the "ecological value card" in Ganyi. From a cultural standpoint, both Yonthar and Ganyi had many local herders whose lives and livelihood were precious, but would the government and the miners care about locals when it came to profit from mining? Local villagers were highly skeptical of leaders looking out for the villagers when an attractive alternative was profits. This explains the key motivation to establish conservation groups in their own communities.

Ganyi's aspiration to learn more about environmental laws was partially inspired by government publicity about Yulshul as a part of the National Sanjiangyuan Nature Reserve. Frequent broadcasts through national and provincial level TV news, as well as by Amdo and Kham dialect TV channels, encouraged locals to take up systematic conservation work.

Government policies in Yulshul were full of contradictions. On the one hand, nature reserves were set up to "protect the environment," which led to multiple conservation projects. On the other hand, mining and other projects exploiting the natural environment were executed in the same area in the name of economic

development. Local villagers were encouraged to hear about the conservation laws regarding their homelands, and then disappointed when the laws were not followed. These laws, to some extent, only exist on paper. By establishing a legal framework that protects these regions through conservation laws and nature reserves, the government looks good. Yet such frameworks are ignored and all kinds of "development" and mining operations are carried out.

I was excited to learn about the locals' plans regarding different issues they were facing in Ganyi, and concluded my presence was unnecessary. A month into my initial study of the village situation, I told Kadra that they were doing well and did not need me. As a member of conservation NGO, my role was to help locals establish grassroots conservation groups based on a management structure they preferred. Ideally, they drafted plans to deal with issues that they thought were important, and we supported them from a distance, not directly become involved in their activities. While we supported them financially and provided technical support, as in the case of wildlife monitoring work in Yonthar, we did not want to get involved in actual work implementation. It was important to keep a distance for a number of reasons. External parties could easily assume the leading role in local grassroots actions, not giving enough space for locals to exercise their autonomy and potential. Also, grassroots action could easily end once external involvement was withdrawn. With this in mind, I felt that my role was to be a bridge between the locals and the resources they needed to realize their plans.

"We need help with the co-op," Kadra said. "We don't have money to set it up. We are looking for funds from different sources, including the Prefecture Animal Husbandry Bureau."

I suggested that they should prepare a detailed work plan, including how they were going to establish a co-op, how they would

run it, and how they would deal with labor division. I said I could use the plan try to attract support from Shanshui and elsewhere.

He agreed saying:

We need support with the education program. We have a monk and layman from our community to teach ordinary community members basic literacy, but we need people to give lessons on environmental laws and policies. I worry that our village will get into trouble if we are unfamiliar with laws about environmental protection.

This seemed like a good idea, and I said I could find people to give periodic lessons about environmental laws related to National Sanjiangyuan Nature Reserve. A few years earlier, a local NGO had collected all the laws and policies related to the Yulshul area, translated them into Tibetan, and compiled them into a book. I had an electronic version on my computer and gave it to him on a flash drive. He was pleased. A few months later, I printed about one hundred copies to be disseminated among villagers. Later he told me that the lay teacher in their village studied it, and was giving lessons regarding those policies to locals.

We agreed to maintain contact. I would find financial and other support for them, but not become directly involved in their work. Kadra and the other village leaders agreed. Over the next two years, I remained in close contact, periodically visiting to see how their work was progressing. I was more of an observer when it came to Ganyi. They continued with their plans, conducting yearly waste management work and holding an education program every winter and spring. Shanshui supported them with a micro-loan project in late 2013. The villagers' detailed co-op plan attracted more support the next year.

In the summer of 2014, the local government provided

150,000 *yuan* to start the co-op. Ganyi successfully opened a shop in the village that transported products directly from Ziling. Village leaders hired two people to run the shop. Their basic salaries were covered. The cheap price of village shop's products made it very attractive to locals, and its convenience attracted neighboring village residents. Village leaders were even planning to build a branch shop by the roadside, the profits of which would be shared by all the villagers.

The village leaders were still considering opening a shop in Jyegu to sell their yak products, but they were careful. Aware that Jyegu had many such shops, they were considering various market strategies to make their products unique and visible. This would take effort and time, but they were more confident with their work and their abilities as their plans developed.

Seeing such efforts underway, I was glad that I had decided to leave Ganyi. A community such as Ganyi, with an effective management structure, clearly assessed needs, and detailed plans to address those needs might find an outsider's direct involvement to be a hindrance, since outsiders often lack an understanding of the local context. In this case, it was a good decision to be an observer rather than a participant.

Ganyi community resource map by Tsering Bum and Ganyi village leader, Kadra (Tsering Bum, 2013).



Ganyi conservation team (Tsering Bum 2013).



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## BROWN BEARS

### MY NICKNAME

In the two years of my life in Hashul, I interacted more with Gomri villagers than residents of other villages. While I visited Yonthar and Ganyi periodically, I always returned to spend more time in Gomri. The village was physically divided into two parts: Gomri Khog 'Gomri Valley', which is adjacent to Hashul Township seat. The other section is Chumayong 'Plain of Cheese and Butter', located about twenty kilometers from Gomri Valley. While Gomri Valley had some areas with caterpillar fungus, the relatively small size of the land meant little caterpillar fungus was harvested. In 2013, it only attracted about a hundred caterpillar fungus collectors who each paid 5,000 *yuan* for a permit. The total revenue of half million *yuan* was divided among the 269 Gomri households (about 1,010 people). Compared to Yonthar's income it was not much, but it was much better than Ganyi's. Gomri's grassland was also superior to Ganyi's, with fewer pikas and black worms. One Gomri villager said, "Our grassland is not that good, but it is far better than Ganyi's. Have you been to Ganyi? You should see their grazing land - there are so many pikas there."

Gomri did not have a village conservation group. In a previous encounter, the village leaders and some elders told me that they wanted to start a village conservation team like Yonthar's because, like the other two villages, they were afraid of miners and wanted to prepare in the event mining attempts came to pass. The locals faced other issues as well, such as conflicts between local

villagers and brown bears. This intrigued me. I thought I might be helpful, so I started to learn more about the issues with the aim of finding solutions.

Gomri Valley adjoins the resettlement homes of Hashul Township seat, and is only about two kilometers from Shanshui's Hashul Office. I did not live in Gomri Valley when I was researching the human/bear conflicts there. Instead, I lived in the Shanshui office, which had bedrooms for Shanshui staff. Everyday, I hired a minivan or a motorcycle from a family in Gomri Valley and went to visit villagers. Shanshui had several cars, but they were often unavailable due to the many projects operated by various teams elsewhere. Consequently, we were often short of vehicles, a problem easily solved by hiring local vehicles. It was better sometimes, because the driver was from the local community and knew the people and the landscape better. This solved the awkwardness when I went to homes that I had never visited before. The driver often helped by introducing me to the family, saying that I was *khoryog tshang* 'environment family', a local term used to refer to conservation organizations. Later as I visited more often, I introduced myself as *richu tshang* 'mountain and water family' - the Tibetan name for Shanshui. Afterwards, Shanshui visitors to Gomri were often called *richu tshang*.

When I was introduced as a member of an environmental conservation group, the villagers relaxed their suspicious attitudes. Considered "practitioners of Buddhism," conservationists were welcomed by locals. When I asked them that why they thought this they usually said, "Because you are saving *sancan tanjad* 'all sentient beings'."

While I grew up in a Buddhist family, most of my colleagues in Shanshui were atheists. I did not say anything when I received such comments.

Once when I was talking with a township government employee about the road conditions during snowy weather, the conversation led to vehicle accidents. He recounted having been in several car incidents due to poor roads, and had on one occasion spent two months in a hospital recovering from an injury. He asked if I had been in any car accidents.

When I said I had not, he commented, "That's because you guys protect the environment. The deities here protect you since you protect the environment. The villagers are praying for the safety of you guys."

I thanked him for his kind sentiments and told him that I hoped to never be in a car accident. While I was glad to hear local villagers' positive reactions to conservationism, I was also embarrassed by such comments. As a conservation NGO, we could do little with our limited resources. It was the local communities that played the major role historically in maintaining the continued existence of many important wildlife species. In my interactions with locals, I often said that many local species, such as snow leopards, brown bears, wolves, and blue sheep would have been extinct in the local areas were it not for the local herders.

My regular visits to the community with inquiries about brown bears brought me two nicknames - Guangtouqiang and Xiongda. The first name was bestowed by a local township staff member, and later popularized by my colleagues and village kids. Guangtouqiang was a logger in a Chinese cartoon TV show that was popular during the time I was in Gomri. Wanting to cut down all the forest trees for economic gain, Guangtouqiang fought two bear brothers that were trying to save their forest home. Xiongda 'Big Bear' was one of the bears. My two nicknames were used interchangeably by those who knew me and who were familiar with the cartoon show.

The two names represented a contradiction. One, a logger, tries to destroy the forests and kill the bears. The other fights the logger, trying to save the forest. I wondered if the contradiction implicit in the two nicknames was because I did not clarify my interest in studying brown bears in the beginning. Actually I did not state my objectives in my interviews with the villagers because I wanted to appear neutral. I was not sure I could do anything about the human/bear conflict before conducting a thorough study and I did not promise that Shanshui would become involved in creating a solution. Locals were not sure if I was there to protect the brown bears, or to help the villagers eliminate the bears. This deliberately created ambiguity resulted in contradictory nicknames.

Local children were more familiar with Chinese TV shows than local animal folktales. With each family owning a TV set and signal receptor, Hashul residents had unprecedented access to mass media, which was fundamentally changing their traditional values and perspectives. Many children did not know any traditional tales and stories featuring animals such as brown bears, but they were very familiar with TV programs that featured bears.

Having grown up in a Tibetan village in the 1990s when there were few TVs in the village, my childhood was filled with tales and stories told by my parents and village elders. At that time my family owned the only TV in the village, a black and white one. At night, many villagers would come to watch it, though the number of programs was limited. Only channel CCTV 1 was available. Children at that time were not distracted by TV shows because they found few that were interesting. They still listened to tales from elders. Two decades later, most children are keenly interested in smart phones and TV programs. Almost no one listens to tales told by village elders.

## BROWN BEARS

Houses in Gomri Valley were often raided by brown bears in summer. Gomri leaders claimed that brown bears had broken into and damaged most local homes, and had eaten stored food. According to the village leaders, more than half of the 269 households of Gomri Village lived in Gomri Valley. I was dismayed by such numbers, because I was planning to visit each family to do an assessment survey. Based on my rough calculations, I needed to visit at least one hundred households. I thought it would take me months since the villagers often lived far from each other, especially during summer when they were away from the river that ran through the valley. At that time, they lived on valley ridges on their summer pastures. However, when I began visiting the households, I found that the household number (269) was based on the household registry, not the actual household division. There were actually only one hundred families living in houses in the village, and sixty in Gomri Valley.

The locals mostly lived in extended families with several household registrations in a single-family unit. In this way they benefitted from free government housing. A free house from such initiatives as the Four Allocations was given based on household registration, so if a family had several sons as indicated by the household registry, they were considered different households, and thus they had a higher chance of each receiving a government-built house. Household registrations increased, particularly in 2010 following the wave of disaster relief after the earthquake. Although Hashul was outside the epicenter and damage from the earthquake was minimal, it was still included in the disaster relief zone because it was a township in Yulshul County. Money poured in to build houses for local herders. Allocation of the houses was based on whether one was an independent family as indicated by the household registry.

The locals were therefore motivated to register for household registry.

The earthquake disaster relief houses for Gomri villagers were built at the township seat, which was impractical for the locals who lived on their grazing land. Most residents still lived in extended families on their grazing land and shared one house, leaving the state-built houses at the township seat empty.

My first visit to the families in Gomri Valley lasted about a month. I took a one-day break every five days, and stayed at the Shanshui office to enter my interview data into the computer. It was also mentally impossible for me to stay focused on doing the same kind of interviews and surveys without a break. Even the drivers I hired were bored with my predictable conversations with the villagers. I hired different minivans or motorcycles just for the sake of giving the drivers a break.

In Gomri, brown bears began breaking into people's homes in the summer of 2011. By August 2013, more than forty-three percent of Gomri families had experienced brown bear break-ins. The bears were smart, not entering homes when the villagers were at home. They came inside only during July and August when the villagers were away on their summer pastures. Most Gomri villagers herded on their winter and summer pastures. Families had houses on their winter pastures. Some of these were built by the government, and some were built by villagers who hired Chinese carpenters and construction workers. The villagers lived in houses on their winter pasture for ten months, from September to June. In July and August, they lived on the summer pastures on the ridge of the valley far from their winter pasture. During those two months the winter pasture houses were unoccupied. Air-dried yak meat, butter, Tibetan dry cheese, wheat flour, and *tsampa* were stored in the houses for consumption during their ten-month-long stay on the winter pasture. The brown bears could smell the food from far away. Realizing the

humans were not in the houses, they started to break into homes at night. The houses were locked, but the poor quality of most adobe houses was no match for the brown bears' powerful paws. Most of the house doors were easily pushed in by the brown bears. While the government-built concrete houses were of relatively better quality, the bears were still able often to break the windows and climb in. In a few rare cases where both the door and windows held firm, the bears, after a great effort to unsuccessfully break in, dug a hole into the back wall of the house and often successfully entered. The result was disastrous. The houses and furniture, including tables, desks and wardrobes, were damaged, and the stored food eaten. Rich foods such as meat and butter were eaten on the spot whereas bags of wheat flour for example, were ripped open, sniffed, and sometimes dragged out of the houses. Whatever was left behind was mostly inedible.

Angry Gomri villagers attempted preventive measures such as blocking the windows with boards or adobe bricks, piling rolls of metal fencing in front of the doors, playing their solar-charged radio loudly day and night, and even installing alarms on doors, hoping the noise of the alarm would scare away the bears. All of these efforts were largely ineffective. Radios and alarmed doors worked one or two times, but the brown bears soon realized that it was a ruse. With the failure of prevention measures, the conflicts between Gomri villagers and brown bears intensified, as did the villagers' hatred of the bears.

In July 2012, a family in Gomri Valley set a trap inside their house in an effort to catch the bears when they entered. Their effort paid off when the trap caught one bear. The family notified a few male villagers who came to the house and stoned the bear to death. They later took the dead bear to the township seat and tried to sell it to some Chinese construction workers, who refused to buy it. It was later confiscated by the township government. While brown bears are a national class two protected animal, and the villagers know that

they should not kill them, the destruction of the houses and loss of food was so serious that they felt they had no choice but to try to eliminate the bears.

"We have no other choices. While bears should not be hurt, we herders need to live. We can not survive if brown bears enter our houses, destroy our houses, and eat all our food," Jamyang said. His house had suffered three bear break-ins in both 2011 and 2012. He had sealed the windows, but without success. He also explained that they had gone to the township government with complaints about the brown bears, hoping the township government would find solutions, but no suggestions were forthcoming. Some of the township government staff explained they could not suggest better methods to solve the issue, and also they lacked funds for issues related to human/wildlife conflicts.

The state government's "conservation projects" usually consisted of pika poisoning, resettlement, fencing of grassland, and herd reduction, and the funding allocation was inflexible. Consequently, new problems, such as brown bear break-ins were largely ignored. Qinghai Province has a policy on wild animal related compensation that stipulates locals will be compensated if wildlife damage their property. However, this policy never seemed to reach the local level.

In 2013, when I was in Ziling at a conference with many government and NGOs representatives, a village leader from Drido complained about brown bears breaking into people's homes, and the fact that they had to endure it without any practical solutions. One government official told him that the local herders should come to Ziling with detailed evidence about the loss of property caused by brown bears, and they would be compensated. In response, the village leader said, "Our travel and lodging might cost a great deal and we are not sure we will be compensated even if we come. Herders

in my community don't speak Chinese and can't communicate with you even if they come to Ziling, so I am not sure if it's a solution."

He said all this in Tibetan, and I translated into Chinese. Due to such bureaucratic obstacles, the township government seemed helpless as well. They often told the villagers to protect their own property by themselves.

One township government staff related a conversation with a villager who had come to him with complaints.

"A bear came to my house and ate all the food a few days ago. Can you compensate for that?" queried the villager.

"No, we don't have money for that," the township government staff replied.

"OK, then can we kill the bears?" the villager asked.

"No, you can't kill brown bears, it's against the law!" declared the township government staff.

"Then how about us! We need protection from the bears!" exclaimed the villager.

"You should create better prevention methods and protect your own property well," the township government staff said.

Such conversations often took place. Most such encounters concluded with villagers leaving the government compound swearing that they were going to kill the brown bears if they were not compensated for their losses. The inability of the local government to provide solutions was also why the township government simply ignored the Gomri men who killed the brown bear. The township governor used a Chinese expression to explain the situation, "We must *zheng yi zhi yan, bi yi zhi yan* 'open one eye and close the other' in this case meaning they needed to pretend nothing wrong was happening, because they could do nothing about it except tell villagers not to kill the bears and strengthen their prevention methods.

In general, Hashul villagers were very supportive of environmental conservation, and also wanted to play a role in conserving local grassland and wildlife. However, they often excluded brown bears from the realm of wildlife. Most Gomri villagers I encountered would say, "We need to protect wildlife, but not brown bears."

When I said that brown bears were also wildlife, most locals replied, "We should protect *nyanchong* 'vulnerable' wildlife, but not brown bears. Brown bears are bad and cruel."

To better learn villagers' attitudes towards the conservation of different species, I asked what they thought about white-lipped deer, wolves, blue sheep, and snow leopards. Most villagers said confidently that such animals should be protected - even wolves that attack their livestock.

"The relationship between wolves and us is always like this," Tugyal said. "Wolves kill our livestock sometimes, but they don't dare come to people's homes, destroy houses, and threaten people's lives."

The locals' attitude towards brown bears is very different. Everyone I talked to said that brown bears should not be protected. They feared the bears might become bolder and begin attacking people. This view grew stronger after locals heard about a brown bear killing a woman in Shewu Town, Chridu County, about 140 kilometers from Hashul. It happened in winter in late 2012. An elderly woman went into the mountains to look for her yaks. She was found dead. She had been attacked and parts of her body had been eaten. From the scratches on her body and animal hair at the site, villagers concluded that a brown bear had killed her. Yet it remained a mystery as to how she encountered a brown bear in winter when the bears hibernated. The villagers and local government officials speculated that the brown bear woke up from hibernation because of

hunger, and when it went searching for food it encountered the woman. Soon after this incident, the local government sent policemen with automatic rifles into the mountains to kill the brown bear. Finding a cave of the brown bears, the police shot into the cave several times from a distance. Three bears soon came roaring out, charging the policemen, who shot them all dead. The news of this incident travelled fast with the aid of WeChat.<sup>19</sup> Many herders in Yulshul use smart phones, and posted and reposted photos of the incident, including photos of the elderly woman's mutilated body and photos of three policemen, each holding the head of a brown bear. These grotesque photos, via WeChat, quickly reached the surrounding areas, including Hashul.

"I didn't know brown bears ate human flesh until I saw this," a villager in Gomri exclaimed while showing me pictures on his phone. "I'm afraid this might happen here in Gomri as well. We must kill them before they hurt anyone."

One Gomri villager named Tuden gave the following perspective:

We herders and wildlife have different life spaces. We should not go out into the mountains and hurt them, because they also need to live. This grassland is also their home, but they should not enter herders' living space. Brown bears enter herders' houses to steal food. That is bad, and they should be punished, and just as police punish human thieves who enter homes steal.

Another villager named Tsedra gave the following account to justify killing brown bears:

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<sup>19</sup> WeChat is a widely used mobile text and voice messaging communication service in China released by Tencent in 2011.

The government says that the wildlife are protected by the law and we cannot kill them. Of course we are not going to kill them, because they also need to live here. The grazing land is also their home, but the government also needs to protect us when wildlife destroy our houses and eat our food. We cannot live without houses and food. We herders also need protection. Now brown bears are becoming even braver, and I am afraid that our lives will be in danger. We can't risk our own lives to protect brown bears. If the law only protects brown bears and not us herders, we need to protect ourselves by killing the brown bears.

Tsedra's comment was one I heard frequently during my stay in Yulshul. Local villagers often express resentment towards snow leopards, wolves, and brown bears by pointing out that though they often attack their livestock, they are protected by the government, while their own needs and interests are ignored. In a way, they were asking for the same rights as the wildlife. While the government remained unable to provide compensation for their losses, they directed their anger at the wildlife.

Later in 2013, I had a long conversation about this issue with Tashi Sangpo, a Tibetan monk conservationist who runs an environmental conservation NGO in Golok, where he had faced similar situations. He shared his thoughts using examples of the relationship between humans and snow leopards in Golok:

Snow leopard prey might have decreased in the past fifty years; that might be the reason that there are more sightings of snow leopards these days. In the past fifty years, particularly prior to the 1990s, there were massive killings of wildlife in Tibetan regions. Locals had weapons [guns and rifles] at that time and were required by the government to hunt such wildlife as brown bears, musk deer, and blue sheep. For instance, the Qinghai Provincial Government required 1,000 kilos of musk in 1984, which meant that 200,000 musk deer were killed. Because of the historical killings of wildlife, their number has decreased

dramatically. Consequently, snow leopards need to come down from the top of the mountains for more food.

Traditionally, snow leopards live atop mountains in the rocks where they have plenty of prey. Nomads live at the foot of the mountains. Their livestock don't need to go to the top for grass. As a result, nomads seldom see snow leopards and have little knowledge of snow leopards. For instance, some nomads mistake leopards for snow leopards. However, when food is scarce for snow leopards, they come down to the middle and bottom of the mountain for prey and may kill livestock. This conflict between humans and snow leopards started in the 1990s. An issue becomes a conflict when humans define it in a certain way, feeling that it endangers their interests.

Locals first felt that the loss of one or two sheep was fine, however, when snow leopards kill, say, twenty sheep belonging to one family, the family members try to kill the snow leopards, even successfully sometimes, but never to the point of killing them all.

Snow leopards, other wildlife, livestock, and nomads all live in the mountains. Sometimes they are enemies, and sometimes they are friends, for example, snow leopards help contain the herbivore population. However, the relationship between snow leopards and humans changes when snow leopards become a nationally protected animal. Snow leopards and nomads are both "ownerless." Snow leopards then have a master - the state - so now when snow leopards kill livestock, nomads ask the owner - the state - for compensation. The relationship between humans and snow leopards becomes monetized at this point, and the human need for revenge increases since the leopards' master should compensate them for their loss.

Compensation for livestock loss may not be the best way to protect snow leopards in Tibetan areas. Conservation should be promoted by using local cultural knowledge and religious beliefs and institutions. I am not denying the validity of state efforts, but I feel that conservation work in Tibetan areas should be based on local culture. In the next fifty years at least, Tibetan culture, Bon,<sup>20</sup> and Buddhist beliefs

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<sup>20</sup> "Bön was the indigenous religion of Tibet before the arrival of Buddhism in the 7th century AD. Today, Bön is similar to Tibetan Buddhism. It is a matter of controversy whether Bön influenced Tibetan Buddhism or the

will play an important role in people's lives. Conservation work for the next half century in Tibetan regions should be based on this unique culture. If Tibetans are Sinicized later, perhaps it will be time to change conservation mechanisms from Tibetan cultural incentives to other methods. Then again, the species in question might be extinct in fifty years if we don't protect them now.

## HISTORY OF THE CONFLICT

Brown bears occasionally attacked livestock that grazed in the mountains, usually targeting sheep and one to two-year-old yaks. The attacks often took place when the herders were either away from the livestock or negligent. Such conflict has been in place for centuries and was considered normal by herders. Sometimes, having lost many sheep or yaks to wolves or brown bears, local herders would be upset and embark on retaliatory killings. Sangga, the leader of the first natural village of Gomri told me, "Wolves, brown bears, and snow leopards occasionally kill livestock, but that's part of our life. Wildlife also need to eat."

This understanding of the human/wildlife relationship changed when brown bears began breaking into homes. Historically, brown bears had no presence in the space occupied by the people in Hashul. The first incident took place as recently as July 2011 when a brown bear broke into the house of a Gomri villager and ate all their yak meat. Subsequently, more incidents took place in other households, as well as other Hashul villages. The conflict has now reached a point where local people believe that "wildlife should be protected but not brown bears." For contemporary Hashul villagers, brown bears are monsters. In tracing the history of the conflict,

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other way around." <http://tinyurl.com/hnfenm3>, accessed 1 February 2016.

villagers contend that it was caused by several transformative changes during the past few decades.

## RIFLE CONFISCATION

The rifles owned by the locals were confiscated by the government in the early 1990s, resulting in a reduction of retaliatory killings in Yulshul, especially of wildlife such as wolves that are deemed threats to livestock. Many Hashul herders felt that their lack of weapons, mainly rifles, was one of the reasons brown bears were able to break into their houses. A herder, Drapel, from Gomri Village said:

In the past, villagers had rifles, and bears lived deep in the rocky mountains. Brown bears were shot at whenever they tried to come down the mountains. Maybe some were killed, and there were other brown bears that were scared away by the gunfire. Now the nomads don't have rifles. Old bears die, and young bears grow up thinking that herders can't hurt them. They come down from the mountaintop to the neck of the mountain, and nothing happens. They become braver and come down from the neck to the bottom of the mountain, and still nothing happens. They finally become brave enough to venture to the foot of the mountain to people's houses, looking for food. I am afraid that they are going to become even braver and attack people. They wouldn't do so if we owned rifles.

Drapel's vivid understanding of the relationship between bears and local herders is common. The locals frequently said that wildlife should be protected for religious reasons based on a sense of the equality of all sentient beings, or because wildlife are protected by state policies. However, most locals think the brown bears should be eliminated, and wish that they had rifles to kill or scare them away.

When I visited Ganyi Village one day, my local driver took

me to visit a family that had recently experienced a brown bear break-in. The bear had not left until noon the next day. This incident was well known in Ganyi Village because the bear had entered the house while the residents were sleeping. This had never happened before. Luckily, the storage room where the bear stayed eating yak meat, was separate from the living quarters of the house. The family members - a couple in their late fifties, the man's mother in her late seventies, and a grandson - realized that a bear was in the next room. They wanted to shout for help from the neighbors, but feared it would only anger the bear. The area was not reachable by phone signal so they could not call anyone. They clustered in a corner of the living room, holding knives and sticks to protect themselves. They did not sleep the whole night, hoping the bear would leave. At about dawn, the bear came out of the storage room, dragging a yak leg to an open space about a hundred meters away. The bear left only after it had finished eating the yak leg.

"It was a feast for the bear. We just watched," the man of the family said when he told me the story. "It wouldn't have been a problem if we had had a rifle. I don't care if brown bears are protected by the law. We need to protect ourselves from them. It's bad enough that the bear ate our food, but we are more concerned about it coming in and eating people at night."

He became more emotional when I asked him what he was planning to do. "I have no idea," he said, "Brown bears have never come into my house before. I don't know what to do. It's almost time to move to the summer pasture. Usually my mother stays in the house by herself, but we are afraid that the brown bears are going to eat her while we are away on the summer pasture."

He shed tears as he talked about this, and his mother and wife also quietly sobbed. Their summer pasture was not accessible by vehicles. They had to walk there every year, which took more than ten

hours. The old woman was no longer able to walk for ten hours. She had stopped going to the summer pasture in 2005, when they received a government-built house. It was one of many uncomfortable moments I experienced during interviews. I did not know what to say. The initial objective of conducting this study was to comprehend the conflict situation with the hope of working with the villagers for a solution, but I still had no idea how to go about it. Finally I said that I was there to learn about the conflict with the hope of drawing external support to solve such problems, but the villagers needed to work together and come up with viable prevention methods. It was all I could muster at that time. As field staff of an NGO, we were promoting community-based conservation actions. This approach posits community members autonomously making decisions regarding management structures, as well as creating working solutions to problems. I was there to provide consultancy and some financial support, and limited input into how local conservation actions were actually conducted.

## SEDENTARY LIFE

Transformative changes in the herders' lifestyle also explain why brown bears break into people's homes. Historically, the locals moved between summer, winter, and even spring and autumn pastures, and dwelt in traditional yak hair tents. When they moved, they packed up everything and took their livestock to a pre-decided location. They left nothing behind, and brown bears dared not approach tents where people lived. This traditional herding practice began changing in the 1990s when the government encouraged Tibetan nomads to settle in fixed homes. The sedentarization process further intensified in the mid-2000s with the implementation of Eco-Resettlement. By then,

many Gomri villagers were convinced that living in houses was better than living in tents. After the 2010 Yulshul earthquake, the government built more houses for Hashul villagers, and by 2013 nearly every family had one. During my work trips to Gomri Valley in 2013, I saw only one yak hair tent. That was the only one in the entire village.

Villagers in the third natural village of Gomri lived in their houses on the winter pasture all year. However, villagers in the first and second natural villages of Gomri lived in their houses on the winter pasture from September to June, and in tents on their summer pasture during July and August. These summer months were a time for the winter pasture to recover and regrow. Now that the villagers had houses, they left most food and other utensils there when they left for their summer pasture. They took only essential items for their two months on the summer pasture. It was during these two months that bear break-ins occurred.

I hired Jamyang, a Gomri villager, as a driver and guide for a few days. Brown bears broke into his house in 2012 and again in 2013. He told me what he thought about the relationship between sedentary life and brown bears.

Brown bears are very smart, and have an excellent sense of smell. They smell meat and butter in houses, and can also detect if people are in their houses. If they think no one is in the house, they break in and eat everything. They might even stay in the house for several days until all the food is finished. They are very smart, and also very lazy. They do not like to work, but live by stealing the result of our hard work. It's easier to break into houses than digging holes in the ground for hours, trying to catch marmots to eat.

Jamyang pointed out that the key reason for bear break-ins was that the food in the houses was easy to get at, an idea shared by

most Gomri villagers. Some locals believed brown bears would not break in if there was no food was in the houses. However, they also felt it was difficult to move their family's food to the summer pasture. Since villagers gave up tents and lived in houses, they bought furniture and foods such as flour and oil, and stored more yak meat in houses for winter consumption. Particularly after the caterpillar fungus boom, they had more cash to purchase food. It was unrealistic to move everything to the summer pastures, which are inaccessible by vehicles.

Brown bears did not break into people's houses in the 1990s and 2000s in Hashul. This was the period after the confiscation of weapons, and intensification of sedentarization. Local villagers concluded that brown bears needed time to get used to the "no rifle" period. In fact, the commencement of conflicts from 2011 in Gomri made sense because it was not until then that the sedentarization process in Gomri Village was complete. Eco-resettlement provided Gomri with many houses. The funds that poured in after the Yulshul earthquake completed the sedentarization process.

## MARMOTS

Some scientists and other interested observers maintained that human-brown bear conflict in the region was caused by a reduction in prey, mainly marmots. A reduction in the marmot population led brown bears to seek alternative food sources. This argument makes sense from a policy standpoint. Locals told me that prior to 2008, many Sichuan Han Chinese came to hunt marmots, mainly for the fat that was used in cosmetics. Many villagers were angry when they saw hundreds of marmots killed with traps and rifles. When some

villagers confronted the hunters, hoping to stop them, the hunters produced approval documents from the authorities. Many local villagers then gave up.

Locals believed that many marmots were killed prior to 2008 after which the marmot hunters did not return. This was the year Yulshul was designated as part of the Sanjiangyuan Nature Reserve. However, Gomri villagers rejected this explanation, saying that while many marmots were indeed killed prior to 2008, marmots reproduce quickly. They argued that after 2008 and without human threats, the marmot population had recovered completely by the time bear break-ins in Hashul became commonplace.

One day in July as I travelled by car in Gomri Village, I counted about seventy marmots by the sides of the road along a two kilometer stretch. However, I am no expert in the study of marmot populations. By 2013, there had not been conclusive studies of marmot populations in Yulshul.

#### BEAR-PROOF SOLUTIONS

After a few months interacting with Gomri villagers regarding the brown bear issue, I discussed finding a solution to this conflict with the village leaders. They were very supportive. Though the villagers' discontent with brown bears was often expressed openly, they were willing to try new strategies to protect their houses and drive the brown bears away without killing them. The village leaders thought that this consensus was a good basis on which to promote bear-proofing projects. Shanshui had previously used solar energy powered electric fences to prevent bear break-ins in Drido County communities. This technology was used in New Zealand to prevent wildlife from entering human spheres. We purchased such solar

panels from a company based in Beijing. This electric fence sent regular electrical pulses through wire, which shocked and frightened intruding animals, but did not seriously injure them. It had worked in some communities, and failed in others. We found that a major reason for failure was that the solar panel did not fully recharge the batteries on cloudy and rainy days. However, the biggest problem was fence management. Sometimes, livestock tangled the fences, which resulted in short circuits and damage to the solar panel. Such technologies had been previously unavailable to local herders, who were unfamiliar with how electric fence systems function. Consequently, when the fences no longer worked, some local herders considered them broken and many families refused to use them.

When I told the villagers about Shanshui's experiences with electric fences, a few Gomri villagers expressed interest in learning how to operate and repair them so training was provided.

I knew there should also be other options. My time in Hashul was limited, and Shanshui would not work in Hashul forever. Communicating with the electric fence company in Beijing required good Chinese language skills. In all my experience, I have never met an adult in Gomri who could speak Chinese well enough to arrange the wire transfer of payment for fences, the shipping from Beijing to Hashul, or other related activities. While such processes might seem trivial, they are significant challenges for residents of remote townships. I realized that if Shanshui were to stop working in Hashul in the near future, this bridge between the local villagers and the electric fence company would disappear. We thus needed alternative solutions to prevent brown bears from damaging the homes.

I suggested to the Gomri village leaders that we hold a meeting with families whose homes had been damaged by brown bears to discuss possible bear-prevention methods. After they agreed, we held our first meeting in early July, outside in an open area in

Gomri Valley. At least one person from each home that had been damaged attended the meeting.

Village leaders had agreed prior to the meeting that they would take charge and try to come up with alternatives. However, the villagers did not want to explore other possibilities after hearing about the electric fences. Despite being expensive, about 3,000 *yuan* per solar panel, and Shanshui providing only twenty percent of the total amount, the villagers were still willing to try the electric fences.

One elder said, "The destruction of our houses and loss of food is ten times more than that! I want to try any possibility!"

At this point, I suggested the possibility of making flat metal covers for windows and doors, as well as building metal fences around the houses. I thought these two methods might work. Furthermore, villagers had a lot of metal poles and fencing given to them every year by the government to fence grazing land, though there was no land left to fence. Consequently, fencing material often accumulated in the village. And Hashul Township and Rongbo Town had blacksmiths that welcomed paid welding work. Using these locally available resources the villagers might be able to solve the brown bear issue without external help. However this proposal was immediately rejected by the villagers, who claimed that it would not work at all.

"The brown bears are very strong. These methods won't stop them!" a man in his mid-thirties shouted amid the loud talk.

Jamga, the village Party Secretary then jumped in and scolded loudly, "How do you know it's not going to work without even trying? Shanshui is here to support us. You can leave if you don't need help and can deal with the problem by yourselves."

This quieted the villagers. Eventually, about thirty of about forty families expressed a willingness to try using metal covers for windows and doors, as well as using electric fences. Knowing that we

would only stay in the background and support as we could, I encouraged them saying, "Please choose a method depending on suitability, or come up with new and better ideas. You need to work this out by yourselves. We will provide some financial support, but we will not do the work for you."

Dismayed, only seven families were finally willing to try. I then realized with concern that this group thought Shanshui would come to each house and do all the work for them, which was impossible. From the very next day, I visited each of the seven families to discuss what methods they would use. Three families decided to use electric fences, three opted for metal window covers, and one family decided to protect the house using metal fence poles and fencing, welding the metal together to reinforce the fence.

The villagers worked by themselves, measuring the windows and doors. They collected whatever metal they could find from their homes, took it to the Hashul Township seat, and asked the blacksmiths there to make fences and windows based on their own designs and instructions. It worked as planned. The cost did not exceed 1,500 *yuan* per family, of which Shanshui covered half.

Nonparticipant families continued to visit me and ask for help. Whenever a brown bear broke into a house, someone from that family would come to the Shanshui office in Hashul commonly declaring, "A brown bear broke into my house last night, do you want to come over and see what it did?"

Sometimes I went to estimate the property loss and take pictures, but at other times, I refused to go. Instead, I encouraged them to take part in the bear-proofing project. This often resulted in responses such as, "I don't have time." "I don't have enough money."

I realized that they were coming to me not for solutions, but for compensation. As a conservationist NGO, the idea seemed to be that we would do almost anything to protect wildlife.

Tashi made this very clear during an angry early morning visit, "A brown bear came into my house a few days ago and ate everything. It also destroyed the window to my house! Can you come see?"

He was with Sangga, the leader of the first natural village of Gomri, and about five other local men. I assumed Tashi had gone to see Sangga first. Sangga privately confided that Tashi's family was very poor and suggested that we go. I did as he suggested and we started off. On the way to his house, I asked Tashi what he was planning to do to prevent the brown bears.

"I'll kill them!" he said, fiercely puffing on his cigarette and breathing heavily.

"Brown bears are endangered species and protected by law, aren't you concerned about that?" I asked.

"Compensate us for our loss, or I'll kill them!" he threatened.

Somewhat shocked, I said, "We're just an NGO. We want to work with you to find solutions, but we can't provide compensation. We don't have that kind of money. Why don't you ask the government?"

It turned out that he had already gone to the township government and had requested compensation. Given his anger and their lack of solutions, the township government staff had suggested he seek help from Shanshui.

We soon reached Tashi's concrete, government-built house that featured a strong metal door. Two windows were the only vulnerable parts of the house. My initial estimation was that he would need about 1,000 *yuan* to make metal window covers for the house, and Shanshui would pay half. I made it clear that there would be no compensation from Shanshui regarding the damage done by the bear and that participation in the bear-proof project was the only option

we could provide. In consideration of his family's poverty, and after a discussion with Sangga, I decided Shanshui would cover seventy percent of the expenses, but I told him that he needed to do all the work himself, which was the same for the other participant families. He agreed, but with little enthusiasm.

The next day, he was supposed to meet me at the Shanshui Office. I had asked Jamyang Nyima, who had just finished making his metal window covers, to help Tashi design and make the window covers and he enthusiastically agreed. Jamyang and I waited for several hours in the morning, but Tashi never showed. Five hours after our appointment, he called from Jyegu Town and said that he was busy with family business and asked if Jamyang Nyima and I could do the work for him.

I angrily told him that it was impossible adding that he should never ask me for help again. After hanging up I told Jamyang Nyima about the conversation. He was also frustrated. A few days later, I heard from Sangga that Jamyang Nyima and Tashi had quarreled over this. I never heard from Tashi again. A month later, I passed by his house, and saw the windows blocked with adobe bricks. Based on what I had seen in other homes, the adobe bricks were no barrier to a bear intent on entering a home.

#### WAIT FOR, DEPEND ON, ASK FOR

Later that year, when having dinner with some Yulshul County government staff, I described my bear-proofing work in Hashul, and related the story of Tashi. Their response was quick and unanimous: "Nowadays, nomads are very lazy, they only know *deng, kao, yao!* They don't want to do anything by themselves."

*Deng, kao, yao* are Chinese terms meaning 'wait for',

'depend on', and 'ask for'. Government officials often used this metaphor to describe local Tibetans as lazy. The government staff I met thought that government had given them a great deal, ranging from houses to eco-compensation. Local Tibetans had learned to depend on government support - to wait for the government to give them whatever they wanted. To some extent, the mentality of *deng*, *kao*, *yao* was apt, however, singularly attributing the cause of this mentality to "laziness" was incorrect. This attitude was also partly the result of recent economic and conservation policy changes in the local landscape stemming from sedentarization and eco-resettlement policies.

Sedentarization was not a natural process; it was facilitated by government policies and financial incentives. For instance, the Four Allocation program of the 1990s and the Eco-resettlement policy of the 2000s achieved the sedentarization of local herders by resettling them in houses ready to move into, and offering cash payments.

Such policies created a welfare state mentality, leading locals to believe that government might provide everything for them. This false perception was particularly true in the case of eco-compensation, which is paid to local herders for resettling and reducing herd numbers. However, most herders rejected the notion that their way of life and livestock were to blame for grassland degradation and thought the government paying them to resettle to protect the grassland made no sense.

Most herders I talked to were suspicious of this payment, thinking it was a strategy to eventually confiscate their land. From a language viewpoint, this makes sense, because eco-compensation is poorly translated into Tibetan as *sarin* 'land fee' by the local government. In any case, the local government had difficulty in encouraging herders to resettle and reduce herds. In these situations,

they would use other methods such as the Two Basic Construction education policy to force parents to send their children to schools. This was much less controversial than forcing herders to resettle. In fact, many families did abandon their homes on the grassland and move into towns with schools. Some families also had to reduce the size of their herds, due to the labor loss after their children began attending school.

The timing of the resettlement and the education policies coincided with the booming price of caterpillar fungus in the mid-2000s, which generated new riches enabling the local herders to live in resettlement homes without financial hardship. In the end, the policy goals of resettling herders were achieved, but through a convoluted process in which the goals of resettlement were never clear to the local herders. For example, some local herders thought eco-compensation was a form of poverty alleviation. This led to the impression that the government would provide everything, and do all the work for them. Eco-compensation, Four Allocation, Eco-resettlement houses - all these government programs were provided free to local villagers, not requiring local villagers to participate in their implementation and subsequent construction. Such opaque and flawed policy strategies in part encouraged local villagers to just ask for what they needed, and wait for the government to do the work for them.

Samjyam, from Walong Village, was in his late thirties. I hired him as a driver. He invited me to his home for a meal one day. When I arrived, several Chinese construction workers were building a livestock enclosure for the family. "It must be expensive to hire people to come and build a livestock enclosure here. How much will it cost to build this enclosure?" I asked.

"I don't know," he said.

"How can you not know?" I asked in surprise.

"It's a project by the Yulshul County Animal Husbandry Bureau," he said, "I will pay nothing, so I don't know how much it costs."

I knew his family had about thirty yaks, and already had a small enclosure for them.

"Do you need this livestock enclosure they are building now?" I asked.

"Not for livestock, but I can always use it for other purposes such as storing yak dung for fuel," he replied.

Later, as we shared a meal of boiled yak meat, he asked me if Shanshui could hire people and build a concrete wall around his house to protect it from brown bears.

I promptly replied, "No, we don't have money for such work, nor is it the way we dealt with issues."

He then asked, "You are friends with the township Party Secretary. Can you ask him about the possibilities of the township government building a concrete wall around my house?"

I said I could ask, but I was sure that they did not have funds for such projects.

My experience and conversation with Samjyam led me to reflect on how I had dealt with Tashi's issue. I should have been more patient. When I angrily told Tashi to never come see me again, I had considered him to be irresponsible and impossible to work with. Later experiences led me to understand that such behavior as Tashi's was partly the result of the lack of community participation in state conservation and development projects. Promoting community-based conservation programs was not as simple as I had imagined. Time and effort were required to achieve projects, and always with a deep understanding of the local situation.

In Gomri, those who participated in the bear-proofing project in 2013 claimed that it worked, at least in the first trial year.

In July 2014, Gomri villagers were once again suffering from brown bear attacks. I visited each household later that month. Many were starting to install metal window and door covers, and put up metal fencing. Jamyang Nyima was considered an expert, and was invited by several families to give advice. He was very proud of that.

I was again asked if Shanshui would provide financial support, to which I replied as before, that we would not unless they came up with much better, locally suitable bear-proof strategies. My initial study of Gomri's economic situation the previous year told me that most families could easily afford the payment for metal window covers and fences. They now had good, locally feasible examples of bear-proof methods suitable for their village.

A house damaged by brown bears in Gomri (Tsering Bum, 2013).



A house damaged by brown bears in Gomri (Tsering Bum, 2013).



Gomri conservation team at work on their annual work plan (Tsering Bum, 2013).



Gomri villagers making windows bear-proof (Tséring Bum, 2013).



Gomri villagers building a garbage collection room (Tséring Bum, 2014).



Gomri village conservation team members and Shanshui's Hashul Office staff (Yunxiang Wang, 2013).



## THE SACRED MOUNTAIN

### MOUNTAIN GUARDS

**W**hen humans' hearts/minds are *karpo* 'white'/'good', humans and land are *thum* 'intertwined', connected together; when humans' hearts/minds are *nag* 'black'/'bad', humans and land are *thum med* 'disconnected.' As Jamyang Sangbo spoke, he put his palms together, demonstrating the *thum* 'intertwined' state of the human body with the land in which he resides. He spoke of this when I asked him about how life now is different from when he was a child. His statement suggests that in the distant past, humans, as well as their culture, were part of nature. They were inseparable and, in this inseparable realm, humans were good because they did not exploit natural resources. However, today, the division between nature and culture has led to the exploitation of nature by the bearers of culture.

Jamyang Sangbo was one of two mountain patrollers I met in Gomri Village while I was conducting research on human/brown bear conflict. He and his work partner, Tsering Norbu, live in Chumayong, Gomri Village. Every summer during caterpillar fungus season, both go up onto Karpo Lhasham, the most esteemed mountain deity of Gomri Village, to protect it from caterpillar fungus collectors. This is an important, sacred task. Locals consider mountain deities to be divine masters of their territories. Ancient beliefs and practices related to deities living in local territories predate Buddhism in Tibet. Mountain deities are often referred to as

*yidag* 'master of the territory'. Almost every Tibetan community has at least one mountain deity.

I was immediately intrigued when I first heard about the work of Jamyang Sangbo. When I asked if I could spend time with him to learn more about their work, he gladly agreed. So in late May 2013, when Hashul locals were busy collecting caterpillar fungus, I went to find them on Karpo Lhasham. Two of my colleagues drove me to Jamyang Sangbo's house in Chumayong, where only the youngest son, twelve year old Dorjee, was at home. He attended Hashul Township Primary School, but school had stopped so students could join their families and collect caterpillar fungus. Dorje was at home alone. His mother and sister were away herding yaks and his father was on Karpo Lhasham.

When I told him why I was there, he said his father had left instructions, and he would take me to Karpo Lhasham, which was not accessible by vehicle. After bidding farewell to my two colleagues, they drove away. I then started walking with Dorjee while his family's white horse carried my backpack containing books, a laptop, a recorder, a camera, some clothes, and a sleeping bag.

Karpo Lhasham, locally referred to as Karpo, is a rocky mountain located in the southwest corner of Chumayong. An awe-inspiring visual spectacle, it stands proudly with its peak in the clouds at the edge of the plain. When standing on the shoulder of Karpo and looking down, unruly, asymmetrical lines of houses can be seen scattered across Chumayong, with Suryul Lake resembling a giant mirror to the east. It was a liberating feeling to be immersed in such an open landscape, an experience that I later enjoyed almost daily during my stay on the mountain. After the four-hour hike from Jamyang Sangbo's home to Karpo I arrived exhausted. Dorjee, however, still looked energetic, and started back home with the horse after unloading my gear at Jamyang Sangbo and Tsiring Norbu's tent.

Before he left, his father told him to return in three days time with dried yak dung for us for fuel.

For the next seven days I stayed with the two men in a small, white-canvas tent. Tethered to a metal pole in the ground near the tent was a ferocious Tibetan mastiff that barked at me madly during the day and was brought into the tent at night. I was scared the first night as I crawled into my sleeping bag at the edge of the tent next to Tsering Norbu, but the dog did not seem to care about me at all at night. His attitude immediately changed, however, once he was tethered outside during the daytime. He resumed barking insanely when he saw me.

"To protect him from bear attacks," Jamyang Sangbo said when I asked why he brought the mastiff into the tent at night. Traditionally, Tibetan mastiffs were untethered and stayed outside to protect livestock.

"He's big, but he can't fight brown bears and survive if they were to attack him," Jamyang Sangbo added.

The tent was really only big enough for two men, the mastiff, several bags of *tsampa* and meat, and a yak dung stove for cooking. My visit had disturbed their regular arrangement. They had to move most of the food to a nearby cave to accommodate my sleeping space in the tent. I regretted not have brought a small tent of my own. Jamyang Sangbo and Tsering Norbu wore traditional sheep-fleeced robes during the day. At night took them off and used them as quilts, as they lay atop sponge mattresses covered with sheepskin.

Our tent was pitched on a hill next to Karpo's main body above 5,000 meters. For the first two nights, I suffered from headaches and insomnia. I was used to living at 4,000 meters, but my body seemed unable to deal with 5,000+ meters. Jamyang Sangbo and Tsering Norbu were very enthusiastic and enjoyed telling

traditional tales, folklore, and stories of Karpo. Sadly, I was not good company in the first two days due to my headaches.

It was late May, and the area was covered by snow. On the first morning, I decided to take a walk on the mountain to forget my headache. I trudged in the snow slowly with no particular destination in mind. A strong, freezing wind struck my face, helping me forget my discomfort. As I walked along a small plain area near the hill, I accidentally stepped into a snow-covered bog. Momentarily frightened, I quickly got out of the bog and then realized my pants were soaked. I hurried back to the tent before my pants froze, took them off, and jumped into my sleeping bag, leaving my clothes to dry by the stove. Both Jamyang Sangbo and Tsering Norbu merrily laughed at my predicament. For them, it was not a sad accident, but a funny event that they often observed and experienced.

Their optimistic attitude toward life made me reflect again on the nature of local conservation work. As outsiders, we will probably always lack the kind of courage and commitment to conservation that locals like Jamyang Sangbo and Tsering Norbu display as part of their temperament and understanding of life.

As I slowly recovered from my headaches, I talked to them about their patrol work, perspectives of the changing natural environment, and reasons for being on the mountain. They welcomed my endless questions. Jamyang Sangbo said, "These days, young Tibetans are not interested in hearing what we elders have to say. They think we know nothing, and we have *samlo nyangba* 'old thoughts'. We are glad you are interested in our stories."

The two men had regular work schedules on the mountain. They got up around seven in the morning, had *tsampa* for breakfast, and then walked around the mountains on the lookout for poachers or people secretly collecting caterpillar fungus. They were particularly looking for outsiders that might be mine inspectors dispatched by the

mining companies. They came back to the tent around noon and had yak meat for lunch. Next, they spent about two hours carving Buddhist scriptures on rocks on Karpo.

They took turns patrolling after the carving work, while the other man rested in the tent. I usually joined them on their morning patrols, but stayed in the tent in the afternoon to wait for and interview them. At around eight in the evening, they stopped work, returned to the tent, and boiled store-bought dry noodles in yak meat soup in a big pot on their tent stove. While traditionally Tibetans used their hands and metal tools to carve stone scriptures, most people now use diesel-powered drills. Tsering Norbu and Jamyang Sangbo used a small diesel-powered drill they'd brought to the mountain on horseback. Usually, Tsering Norbu did the carving work, while Jamyang Sangbo moved the drill around for his companion. The scriptures they carved were 'Om Ma Ni Pad Mi Hom' - the Six Sacred Syllables of Tibetan Buddhism. When I asked Tsering Norbu why they carved scriptures on rocks everyday, he replied, "All these mountains, everything on this mountain - stones, plants, and animals - belong to Karpo. Many people do not understand that. They harm the animals, and dig medicinal herbs here. Scriptures carved on the rocks announce that this is a sacred place and they will be less likely to hurt *sanjan* 'sentient beings' here."

"What about people who don't have religious beliefs? Will they think it's sacred and not hurt the sentient beings?" I asked.

Tsering Norbu quietly contemplated.

"*If dad ba mi da* 'faithless' people come here, it won't stop them. Only we can guard against such people. That's why we live on the mountains," Jamyang Sangbo said, assuming Tsering Norbu had no answer.

Since 2006, Jamyang Sangbo explained, village leaders had chosen four people to conduct regular patrols on the mountain to

prevent poaching. During caterpillar fungus season from late May to late June, the village sent two men to live on Karpo for the entire month to stop caterpillar fungus collection. Every year, Tsiring Norbu and Jamyang Sangbo gladly took up this job. To ensure that no one clandestinely moved onto Karpo to collect caterpillar fungus, at times collectively decided between 20 June to 1 July, one person from each family would go to Karpo and over a two day period collect the fruiting bodies of caterpillar fungus. They believed this would make it more difficult for outsiders to find caterpillar fungus. In 2011, they picked 2,700 fruiting bodies, and 3,000 in 2012. The fruiting bodies were handed over to the two mountain guards, who then buried them. Jamyang Sangbo and Tsiring Norbu believed everything from Karpo should stay on Karpo. If caterpillar fungus were removed, the earth would lose its *kyed* 'nutrition' 'fertility', and the environment would degrade. In 2013 one caterpillar fungus was worth between forty to one hundred *yuan* depending on size and the local market. Still, locals thought that money was not worth the disasters Karpo might inflict on locals when the environment was destroyed. Gomri villagers' perspective and actions were in stark contrast to that of Yonthar, which also had a mountain deity - Golo Gyalbo. Golo Gyalbo is considered the highest-ranking deity in all Hashul Township. Nevertheless, there were no restrictions on collecting caterpillar fungus in Yonthar. In fact, Yonthar was dependent on the caterpillar fungus economy, and had already developed a sophisticated management system. These two communities were one tribe with a single identity six decades ago, but now, differences in values and cultural attitudes between the two villages were in sharp contrast.

## THE DEITY'S WRATH

According to Jamyang Sangbo, Karpo punishes locals with snow disasters and diseases when they do not protect the local natural environment well. Jamyang Sangbo believes that the natural environment where the villagers live belongs to Karpo, and the villagers themselves are mere *dronpo* 'guests' of Karpo and thus obligated to protect the environment for Karpo as compensation for allowing the villagers to live there.

Before 2006 Gomri villagers collected caterpillar fungus on Karpo, but this changed after a snow disaster in 2005 killed many local livestock. Locals believed that the livestock deaths resulted from collecting caterpillar fungus on Karpo. This had angered the deity, who expressed wrath towards the villagers in the form of a snow disaster. The relationship between snow disasters and the protection of the natural environment was sharpened after locals consulted Lozang Norbu, a lama of Hashul Monastery. Jamyang, a Gomri villager, later gave me a copy of Lozang Norbu's teaching. An excerpt follows:

You should protect Karpo. Protecting Karpo will benefit all living beings. It will increase your *sodnam* 'merit', not only for yourselves, but also for the world. If you don't protect this mountain, livestock may sicken, people may become ill, there will be snow disasters, the four elements [earth, water, fire, and air] will cause destruction to the world.

This teaching played a major role in shaping the Gomri villagers' current commitment to protecting Karpo and the surrounding areas. It also firmly seeded the idea that natural disasters might ensue if they do not protect the environment. I heard such perspectives later while visiting families after my Karpo trip. One man born in 1940 told me:

There weren't many disasters in the Jigten nydingba 'the Old World' while many disasters occur in Jigten sarba 'the New World'. This is because there are many *sogchag sodkam* 'animal killers' and *koryug dorlag shaykan* 'environment destroyers'. Much wildlife was killed during the Cultural Revolution, which angered Karpo and snowstorms then befell us. We and our livestock suffered.

"Old World" refers to the time prior to the region's incorporation under direct PRC administration, whereas "New World" refers to the time after that. Many elders use this reference of old and new worlds, statist propaganda terms describing Tibet's current and past situations. This statement by my consultant also suggests a loss of wildlife during the Cultural Revolution, the result of state-mandated hunting tasks assigned to community production teams to meet production quotas.

When I specifically asked this elder what he meant by "environment destroyers," he said that he meant miners. I later realized that this was a term often used by many Hashul villagers. As of 2014 there were no mining operations in Gomri Village, however, locals are familiar with mining operations in neighboring Drido and Chumarleb counties. This creates much worry that mining will also come to Gomri.

One day when Jamyang Sangbo returned from patrol, he saw some strangers walking in the distance and was afraid they were mine prospectors. He was relieved when he saw them walk past Karpo into the area of Rongbo Town. Wanting to better understand his perspectives on mining, I asked him why mining was bad.

He seemed surprised to hear such a question replying, "It's very bad!" He then sat cross-legged in front of me, as if giving me a lesson. "I will tell you why it's bad, maybe you should write it down!"

I immediately apologized for asking such a question explaining that I knew that mining was bad, but was hoping to better

understand his particular views. Relieved to hear this, he continued:

Mining destroys the grasslands and pollutes the rivers, leaving livestock and wildlife with no place to graze and live. I went to a mining site in Drido and that's what is happening. I saw it with my own eyes! Local herders got some money, but it isn't enough. Their grassland is destroyed and they can never return to their herding way of life. Mountain deities are angered and will cause snow disasters and earthquakes when mining takes place. The earthquake in Jyegu in 2010 was because of mining - many people say that.

During my stay in Hashul I regularly heard that the destruction of the herding life and the natural environment was followed by the wrath of the deities. Though mining had not taken place in Hashul, the locals I talked to expressed opposition and anger towards mining. The establishment of village level conservation teams was in part, a way of responding to possible mining threats. These attitudes and efforts by local Hashul residents suggested that if mining ever began in Hashul, locals would use all the means at their disposal to resist.

#### MINING OFFERS

Tsering Norbu was born in a tent at the foot of Karpo where he grew up. His family's grazing land was just below Karpo. The land had multiple meanings for him: it was spiritually significant as well as important in providing a livelihood for his family. He told me that in 2011, some Chinese had visited, offering to buy his grazing land. "I knew those Chinese were miners," he said. "They offered 100,000 *yuan* for my grazing land. It's a lot of money, but I refused. I can't allow them to dig up Karpo. It would be a bad thing."

Tsering Norbu said the same people came again in 2012

and this time offered 150,000 *yuan*. Again, he refused. The villagers became very alert after that. Afraid that the miners were secretly examining the earth for precious metals, they paid special attention to any outsiders that came into the area. I was also frequently stopped in Gomri by villagers to see if I was a miner.

Patrol work was not unpleasant for Tsing Norbu and Jamyang Sangbo. They enjoyed it, even though they often encountered the issue of legal jurisdiction over the patrol area because Karpo straddled Hashul borders with Rongbo Town of Yulshul County, and Rashul Township of Drido County. A smaller part of Karpo falls into the current territorial administration of Rongbo and Rashul. When they were on patrol, they often met people from those two areas who rejected their patrol authority, saying that they were within their own jurisdictions, which had nothing to do with Hashul.

This predicament was the result of the new territorial landscape. Karpo is a single entity from a cultural perspective, and it had been that way prior to the region's incorporation under direct PRC administration. However, re-spatialization of the local territory in the 1950s disrupted traditional cultural land boundaries, resulting in Karpo physically being divided across three sections.

Tsing Norbu was thinking of new solutions. He knew that Shanshui supported members of conservation teams in Yonthar and Ganyi in their attempts to obtain patrol certificates from the Hashul Township Government. Such papers gave those villagers legal authority to apprehend poachers and report them to the local police. Tsing Norbu thought a certificate from the township government was not enough to solve the current dilemma on Karpo. They needed patrol certificates from the Yulshul Prefecture level government to have authority to do cross-county border patrols. He hoped to convince the township government leaders to help him, but by the

time I left Hashul in late 2014, this had not happened.

## THE POEM

On the afternoon of the seventh day of my stay on Karpo, I had my last interview with Jamyang Sangbo and Tsering Norbu. Early the next day, I planned to head back to Gomri Village, hoping to talk to other villagers about Karpo Deity. I said that I would walk down the mountain and then go straight to the nearest house to meet some villagers and, after I was done, I would hire a car to take me back to the Hashul Township seat.

Jamyang Sangbo disagreed. He said that he would escort me to a home where I would be well taken care of. After refusing several times, I eventually accepted his offer and thanked him. We chatted casually and then they began asking me about my studies in the United States, Shanshui's conservation work in Yulshul, and my family life back in Amdo.

After a while, Jamyang Sangbo asked me to write a *nadod* 'poem praising sacred land' for Karpo. Traditional *nadod* are written to praise the beauty of a sacred landscape, or to appraise the wisdom of ancient sages or great spiritual leaders. I had not been particularly fond of traditional poems when I had studied poetry as a mandatory part of my Tibetan literature classes. However, both Jamyang Sangbo and Tsering Norbu insisted, and I felt obligated to write one. In the end, I told them to give me a few hours to compose it.

They gladly agreed and went out on patrol. I racked my brains and after about three hours I came up with my first traditional Tibetan poem since junior middle school:

White rocky mountain resembling a conch-palace  
(Your) peak is immersed in the heavens  
The fame of (your) power has reached ten corners of the world  
(Your) beauty and majesty are known throughout the world  
(You are) the residence of the deities  
(You are) the meditation place of the great sages  
(You are) the nirvana of snow leopards, brown bears, and blue sheep  
(You are) the savior of Hashul people  
Your miracles, esteemed one  
Are praised by songs from humble me

Jamyang Sangbo and Tsering Norbu returned on schedule and I showed it to them, hoping it was to their liking. They read it together slowly and purposefully. After a while, Jamyang Sangbo smiled broadly, thanked me, and then read from the poem: "(You are) the nirvana of snow leopards, brown bears, and blue sheep."

"Why do you say that?" he asked.

I understood his confusion, because normally wildlife does not appear in *nadol* poems, at least not in the ones I have read.

"These animals are important for nature's health. As you two have mentioned, these animals belong to Karpo, so you need to protect them. However, nowadays, these wildlife can also help protect Karpo. For instance, the snow leopard is an endangered animal, and protected by the government. These mountains are the habitats of these animals. If we protect them, these mountains, including Karpo will also be protected, because they are important habitats for these animals. While the government may not care about the loss of culture, and the spiritual significance of these mountains, they care about these endangered animals. We need to use that to our advantage. Protect the animals so that your mountain deities can be protected," I answered.

They thought for a bit, and then Tsering Norbu said, "There is a man in my village who often hunts snow leopards."

I had assumed that no Gomri villagers hunted wildlife so I was surprised to hear that.

"There is only this one man," Tsering Norbu continued. "You should know that we Gomri villagers don't like to hurt wildlife, but there are always one or two bad men in every community. I'm sure it is the same in your Amdo home area."

I nodded, acknowledging the truth of his statement.

"We should do something to let him know that he can not hunt snow leopards," Jamyang Sangbo added.

Our conversation regarding the hunter continued for a while. They had learned that the hunter was killing snow leopards, brown bears, and musk deer and selling musk, fur, and bones on a black market in Jyegu Town. When they had talked to the hunter, expressing concern, he had replied that they had no authority to stop him. They had considered reporting him to the township government, but recognizing that he was a member of Gomri, they were afraid that he might end up in jail and they did not want to see that happen to a fellow villager.

After our conversation, they decided to do something. Our original plan changed: Jamyang Sangbo said that instead of visiting another home, he would take me to the Gomri Village leader and Party Secretary who lived in Gomri Valley, to talk about this issue and hopefully find a solution. I agreed and the next day, we said goodbye to Tsering Norbu, who would continue patrolling.

## THE LAND OF MEANINGS

On our way back, Jamyang Norbu continued educating me about the surrounding landscape. "Look! That rock was the general of Karpo... That hill there was the horse of Karpo... That was Karpo's kitchen..."

he would explain, pointing to various landscapes and then telling me a related story. When we reached his home, his elder son was there to receive us. After a meal of noodle soup with dried yak meat, we got in his son's mini-van. As we headed to Gomri Valley, Jamyang Norbu would ask his son to stop, get out the car mini-van, and point out landscapes of cultural, historical, and religious significance. Outsiders would see these landscapes as "wilderness" or "nature," however, in the eyes of Jamyang Sangbo, they were landscapes laden with meaning and significance. Perhaps it was this different perception of the natural surroundings that set the Hashul villagers apart from many outsiders, and such beliefs that motivated them to protect their land.

In the evening, we met Gomri Village leaders to discuss the snow leopard issues that Jamyang Sangbo and Tsiring Norbu had raised. They energetically discussed if they should turn in the snow leopard hunter to police. When they asked my opinion, I said that it was an issue that needed to be addressed soon, but it was up to them as to how to deal with it. I hoped that they would come up with solutions and management plans that would decrease or eliminate the involvement of outsiders. Eventually, they decided to set up a conservation team after the caterpillar fungus season had ended. The team would be responsible for patrols guarding against poachers. As for the poacher from their own village, they would talk to him and again ask him to stop hunting. If he continued to hunt snow leopards and other wild animals, he would be turned over to the township authorities for legal punishment. When I talked to Jamyang Sangbo a year later, he told me that after they had established the conservation team the village poacher had stopped hunting. Other villagers had told him the poacher was afraid of being turned over to the authorities and imprisoned.

In July of the same year, the village leaders held a meeting

with all the villagers, and selected forty-five people as members of the conservation team. Those selected represented the different herding groups of Gomri Village, and were responsible for patrolling for poaching, managing human/wildlife conflicts, and organizing community members to conduct waste management work. After the initial establishment of the team, they held a meeting and drafted regulations for the village conservation team. I attended this meeting. The regulations stated that anyone seen poaching on Gomri territory would be fined 10,000-20,000 *yuan*. If the same person was found poaching twice, he would be fined again and turned over to local authorities for legal punishment. The regulation also stated that the villagers could not sell their land to miners, and every villager was responsible for prohibiting miners from entering Gomri Village.

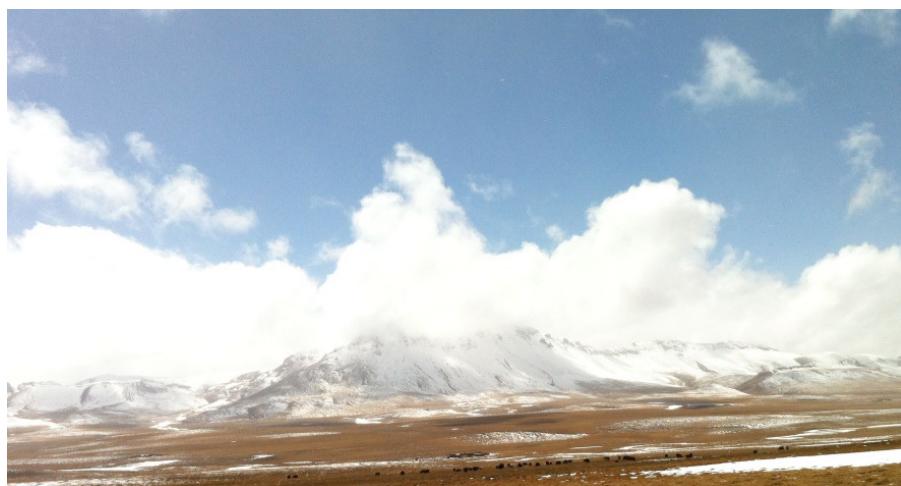
## THE RITUAL

I continued my study of Karpo deity. In mid-August, Gomri villagers held the annual Karpo consecration ritual and I participated at the invitation of Tsering Norbu. A man from each family was required to attend and bring *tsampa*, grain, and conifer needles as offerings that were burned as *sang* - offerings for Karpo. On motorcycles, the men sped towards Karpo, parked at the foot of Karpo, and for about two hours climbed up the mountain towards its shoulder where we reached the ritual altar, a platform made of stones where four monks from Hashul Monastery officiated. At least one person from each family was present. All the conservation team members were also there. As the men made a fire with yak dung on the altar to prepare for the *sang* offering, the monks chanted ritual scriptures to call Karpo to feast on the offerings. Part of the scripture goes:

We as your servants  
Destroyed the stones of rocky mountains  
Dug up the soil of the earth  
Plucked the roots of grass  
Stirred up the water  
Fire is filled with the odor of burned flesh  
Water is dirtied with trash  
Neighbors have turned bad and quarrel  
Herbivores and carnivores are killed  
(All these acts) violate your wishes  
For all the bad things and bad acts  
Please accept this sang offering in atonement

This ritual with everyone present reinforced their understanding and belief in Karpo, and Karpo's importance to the villagers and their environment. After the ritual, everyone, sitting in groups, shared the store-bought snacks for lunch. During the meal, the village Party Secretary gave a short speech, saying that the establishment of the conservation team meant that team members should lead other locals to better protect Karpo and its wildlife.

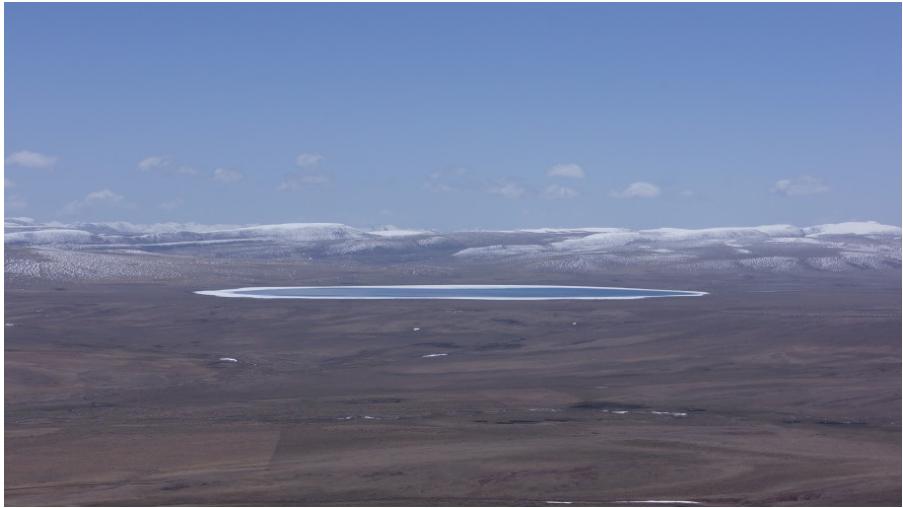
Karpo Lhasham Mountain in Chumayong of Gomri (Tsering Bum, 2013).



Karpo Lhasham Mountain in Chumayong of Gomri (Tsering Bum, 2013).



Suryul Lake in Chumayong of Gomri. View from the shoulder of Karpo Lhasham (Tsering Bum, 2013)



Jamyang Sangbo on patrol on Karpo Lhasham (Tsering Bum, 2013).



Jamyang Sangbo and Tsering Norbu carving Buddhist scriptures on Karpo Lhasham rocks (Tsering Bum, 2013).



Jamyang Sangbo and Tsering Norbu's tent on Karpo Lhasham (Tsering Bum, 2013).



The mastiff owned by Jamyang Sangbo and Tsering Norbu on Karpo Lhasham (Tsering Bum, 2013).



Hashul Monastery monks chanting on Karpo Lhasham during Karpo Deity's annual consecration ritual (Tsering Bum, 2014).



Gomri Village Party Secretary, Jamga, holds a meeting with participants during the annual consecration of Karpo Deity on Karpo Lhasham Mountain (Tsering Bum, 2014).



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## BEYOND NATURE

YOUTH

**B**y 2014, we had projects in all four villages of Hashul and it was no longer practical for me to spend a great amount of time in any one village because of my increased work responsibilities. I then stayed in Shanshu's office in the Hashul Township seat, and visited different villages whenever needed. Living at the township seat proved to be useful in gaining a deeper understanding of the complex life of Hashul residents, especially in understanding what happens beyond nature conservation.

The township seat was a center of Hashul social and administrative life. Local government offices, the primary school, the health clinic, and police station were all here, and thus many locals often came for various reasons. There were a dozen shops that sold clothing, drinks, and foods; a couple of restaurants; two pool rooms; and a basketball ground. These attracted young people who often drove cars or rode motorcycles to this small town. Huge loudspeakers attached to the end of the rear seat of their motorcycles often blared out US and Chinese pop songs and rap music. Some elders would curse them as they drove through the lanes of resettlement homes with music blaring. Most of these youths did not go to schools and were unemployed. They waited for the caterpillar fungus season to make a quick buck, and then over the rest of the year spent the money at either the township seat or in Jyegu. They ate in restaurants everyday, stayed in fancy hotels, and drove their SUVs here and there.

The ones I talked to seemed to have no particular plans for the future. They were uneasy when I asked what they would do if the caterpillar fungus economy collapsed. The only answer was, "I don't know."

The local government annually paid the villagers eco-compensation and resettlement subsidies. The amount of eco-compensation and subsidies differed depending on the size of the grazing land a family owned. In Hashul, it often ranged from 3,000 to 5,000 *yuan* per family per year. Sadly, the government had no plans or visions for the young people's aimless life in the township. Vocational skill trainings of any sort were unheard of during my entire stay in the Yulshul area. A twenty-two year old young man from Walong Village, Hashul told me the following as we played pool at the Hashul Township seat:

I never went to school, I didn't want to go to school when I was a child, and my parents also didn't want to send me to school. They wanted me to herd yaks, and that's also what I wanted to do. But now I don't think that way. I don't want to herd yaks. It's difficult and tedious. I want to be like you guys - know several languages and travel to different places, but I can't. I can't read or speak Chinese. I would get lost if I was in a big city. I hope that we have caterpillar fungus every year, so that I'll have money. Otherwise, I wouldn't know what to do with my life. Maybe I can be a driver for Shanshui.

## STDs

According to an employee at the township health clinic, the "joblessness" of Hashul people was not the biggest issue. He thought other issues were more critical. "Money is a big troublemaker! Now the herders have money from caterpillar fungus. They are rich and often spend it in bad ways," he said. He explained that many Hashul

men went to Jyegu to find sex workers. Local people were not educated in terms of condom use and topics related to sex were taboo in a family setting. This health clinic worker said that many men came to him with STDs (sexually transmitted diseases) and often told him that the symptoms appeared after having intercourse with sex workers without using condoms.

"It is frightening!" he said. "Men are infected, so of course their wives at home are also infected, but women are too shy to come ask for treatment."

I had not heard any of these issues when I visited village homes the previous year. I knew that certain issues were taboo, and this was one of them. Furthermore, since I was known to be a member of a conservation group, people would talk to me about issues related to the natural environment. Topics such as health issues were beyond what I usually encountered and studied. When the health worker asked for advice in dealing with such issues, I said that in matters of life and death, cultural taboos should not be a hindrance in seeking medical help, and that he should encourage men to bring their wives to the clinic. That's all I could say, and I wondered how many more issues the people of Hashul would have to face and deal with in their daily life.

#### FERAL DOGS

One day in late June, as I was walking towards the office after meeting some friends at the township seat, I passed by a small meadow at the edge of a resettlement house cluster where two yak calves were being chased by about ten dogs. At this stage they were not attacking the yaks, just chasing them, tiring them out. I watched intently. After a while, the dogs managed to single out one yak while

the other one ran away. They then chased the little yak around the meadow until it was exhausted and collapsed, at which stage they started attacking and biting it. I shouted from afar, but they did not leave. I picked up a few pebbles, went nearer, shouting all the while. The dogs fled when I threw stones at them. The mother yak soon came running to the calf, which staggered away towards her.

These homeless, feral dogs roamed in Hashul Township and the surrounding mountains. They were the byproduct of the Tibetan mastiff "fever" of the last decade that saw many rich Chinese business people buy Tibetan mastiffs as pets, which sent the price of Tibetan mastiffs soaring. Most of the "authentic," purebred Tibetan mastiffs cost from tens of thousands to more than a million *yuan*.

Tibetans have traditionally considered dogs to be the companions of nomads, and believed buying and selling dogs was evil and cruel. Such commerce was scorned and distained. However, in the face of profits thousands of *yuan* that could be made, many local Tibetans began not only buying and selling the dogs, but also breeding them. In Hashul, as well as in other areas of Yulshul, the result of the mastiff business was the cross-breeding of both "pure" and "impure" mastiffs. Those considered "impure," or ones that did not physically manifest the stature and beauty of Tibetan mastiffs, were tossed out, becoming feral. The mastiff fever slowly ended, particularly after the 2010 Yulshul earthquake. Fewer and fewer rich Chinese were interested in buying Tibetan mastiffs. When this decline in demand hit the local market, many Hashul villagers were unable to either sell the mastiffs or even feed the many they had. Many families took their dogs and released them near monasteries, hoping that monks and pilgrims would take pity and feed them. Pilgrims and monks did feed the dogs, but the number of feral dogs only increased. Unable to live off such "alms," they began attacking livestock. In some cases, they formed packs and went into the

mountains to hunt blue sheep and other wildlife. A Jyegu resident described the situation as the feral dogs "regaining their wild nature."

While seemingly afraid of people during the day these feral dogs were very ferocious at night. At Shanshui's office, we were particularly careful when we were out at night, fearful of the packs of dogs that attacked single pedestrians. It was a concern for Yulshul local herders and conservationists because of the impact on both livestock and wildlife. I realized that while focusing on the issues of human/wildlife conflicts, waste management, and anti-poaching, new environmental issues were emerging in this changing social and economic landscape.

I talked to a man in the township government about the feral dogs, hoping to hear their plans for dealing with the issue. He said that local villagers did not want to get rid of the dogs by killing them, but at the same time they were not able to feed them. "We have to let this issue evolve and resolve itself naturally! We can't do anything about it!" he concluded.

#### THE ANTI-CORRUPTION CAMPAIGN

In Yonhar, villagers and collectors from other regions felt that in 2014, there were fewer caterpillar fungus compared to the previous year, disappointing everyone. The price was also much lower: in 2013 an average size caterpillar fungus had brought sixty *yuan* while in 2014, it was only thirty-five *yuan* on average. About 1,500 outsiders had paid high fees for collection permits. I talked to several collectors from Haidong Region when I visited Yonhar. A Han Chinese man said that he was unable to collect enough caterpillar fungus to cover the permit fee. He explained that his problems were more than the scarcity of caterpillar fungus. The anti-graft campaign taking place

throughout China meant that, "Rich government officials won't accept caterpillar fungus as gifts anymore, because of Xi Jinping's anti-graft policies. While this is a great thing, it also affects our livelihoods."

I heard this comment many times in Hashul. I was unsure how true it was, but the low prices seemed to be affecting everyone, including a Han Chinese restaurant owner in Hashul. He reported, "Locals came here everyday for meals last year during the caterpillar fungus season, and ordered many dishes, but few people come this year, and they do not order much. Business this year is bad!" He was planning to close down the restaurant later that year and return to his home in Ziling if business did not improve.

In Yonthar, Tanwang was worried that collectors from other regions would demand the return of permit fees, since many were not able to make a profit. However, he was determined to hold his ground. "We don't control the weather, and we don't control the price. It's just unfortunate if the price is bad this year, and there isn't as much caterpillar fungus as people hoped. We can't do anything about it. It's not our problem if they don't make a profit," Tanwang said.

Tanwang did not need to worry about the collectors demanding money. That same day, I talked to a group of Mongour from Minhe County in Haidong Region. I asked them whether they would demand return of the permit fees.

"We already signed a contract so we are unable to ask for a return of the fees. Besides the herders wouldn't agree to *ge ziji shenshang de rou* 'slice the flesh off their own body'," one man in their group answered in Qinghai Chinese dialect.

"I borrowed 10,000 *yuan* from a relative to pay for the permit," another added. "So far, I haven't even made enough to repay the loan, not to mention making a profit. I'll soon be deeply in debt."

He looked down and anxiously puffed on a cigarette. In his early twenties, far from home and trying to make a living, he was feeling the strain of financial worries.

Changes were unpredictable in Hashul. Everyone seemed to be optimistic about their lives during the caterpillar fungus season in 2013 but, in the same place and only a year later, people were generally depressed and concerned about their livelihood.

## YULSHUL CITY

Yulshul County of Yulshul Prefecture was officially re-designated "Yulshul City" in 2014 after the completion of the post-quake reconstruction. A symbol of development in the Chinese political context, it was trumpeted as successful reconstruction work by the government. The city held a five-day, grand Kham Arts Festival in late July 2014. Every village, township, and county in the prefecture was required to participate by performing traditional dances and songs, or joining horse or yak race events. Consequently, Hashul village leaders had to organize people to prepare the various events and displays. That month, right after the caterpillar fungus season, was a busy time of festival preparation.

Kham Tibet's four administrative areas are Nagchu District in the Tibet Autonomous Region, Karze Prefecture in Sichuan Province, Yulshul Prefecture in Qinghai Province, and Dechen Prefecture in Yunnan Province. The Kham Arts Festival is held annually, rotating among these regions. Although after the 2010 earthquake Yulshul was not able to participate, by July 2014, Jyegu had been completely rebuilt. This would be the first time Yulshul Prefecture had held a grand festival since the earthquake. It was not only considered a grand show of cultural festivities, but a chance to

show the rest of China and the world that the government had successfully rebuilt Yulshul. It demonstrated economic power, as well as the state's political legitimacy over the region by showcasing its reconstruction efforts.

It is indeed a beautiful modern town now. My memories of its devastated, dusty condition in 2012 had little in common with the grand, Tibetan style buildings and streets, shops, hotels, and restaurants of 2014. The size of the town has also greatly expanded with the number of houses and buildings exponentially more than before the earthquake. In fact, with many more buildings than what local residents need, many are vacant. Several government officials I met proudly claimed that the reconstruction efforts had fast-forwarded Jyegu Town thirty years in terms of its "development."

During the festival, I walked about the town with friends, admiring the new buildings and the colorfully clad locals who were there to perform. I tried to remember the town and its people in 2012 when it lay in rubble. I could not visualize it clearly, given the new modern buildings and joyous expressions of people on the streets. I passed the Earthquake Site Museum on the site of a collapsed building during the earthquake. It remained as a reminder of that tragic past. In less than four years, the landscape of the same space had been completely transformed. There were no signs of traditional Tibetan markets and streets prior to the earthquake. These existed only in the memories of the land, the people, and on photo-sharing sites. The Earthquake Site Museum reminded the people of the tragic event, the subsequent reconstruction, and also the gratitude they were expected to feel and display for the state through such events as the Kham Arts Festival.

Yulshul City (Hang Yin, 2014).



A street in Yulshul City (Tsering Bum, 2015).



# NON-ENGLISH TERMS

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## A

achro, a 'kho ཁྱෙ

amdo, A mdo ཁྱ མ

## B

baima dorje, pad ma rdo rje ད୍ୱ ཕ ར୍ୱ

bartsong, 'ba' rdzong ད ས ར ཤ ག

bu, 'bu བ

buchu, 'bu khri བ ག

bu kexue 不科学

bunag, 'bu nag བ ཉ

## C

caochang zheng 草场证

cham, 'cham ཇ མ

chenlay, 'phrin las ཇ ི ལ

cholkha sum, chol kha gsum ཁ ག མ ག ཟ

choje rinpoche, chos rje rin po che ཁ ག ར དྷ ཚ ག ཆ

chongchong, khrung khrung ང ང

chridu, khri 'du ཁ ར ཏ

chumayong, chur mar gzhung ང ག མ ག

chumarleb, dhu dmar leb ང ག མ ག

chupal sangpo, chos dpal bzang bo ཁ ག མ ག ག ག

chura, chur ba ང ག

cun 村

## D

dad ba mi da, dad pa mi 'dug ད ག མ ན ག

dangla, gdang la ད ག མ

dangpo, dang po ད ག

dartso, dar mtsho ད ག ཁ

dechen, bde chen བད་ཆེན།  
demo, bde mo བད་མོ།  
deng, kao, yao 等, 靠, 要  
dewa, sde ba བྱ་པ  
dongju, ldong 'jo ིඳුංජු  
dorjee, rdo rje ིඳු  
drapel, dgra 'phel དྕରྙ ཚେଲ  
drido 'bri stod དྕି རୋଡ  
drogkad, 'brog skad དྕ୍ରଗ རକ  
dronpo, mgon po དྕ୍ରଙ རୋ  
druchu, 'bri chu དྕି ཛୁ  
drugmo, 'brug mo དྕ୍ରୁ རୋ  
drugpa, 'brog pa དྕ୍ରଗ དପ

## G

gan lho, kan lho ཁାନ ཁାନ  
Gansu 甘肅  
ganyi, bskal nyi ཁାନ୍ୟି  
ge ziji shenshang de rou 割自己身上的肉  
geluk, dge lugs ཁେ ལୁଗ  
golo gyalbo, mgos lu rgyal po ཁୋଲ ལୁଗ རୋଗ  
golok, mgo lok ཁୋଲ  
gomri, gom ri ཁୋମ  
Guangtouqiang 光头强  
gyaltang, rgyal thang ཁୁତଙ

## H

Haidong 海东  
Han 汉  
hashul, hwa shul ཁୁଶୁ  
haxiu 哈秀  
hukou 户口

## J

- jya, rgya རྒྱ
- jamga, 'jam dga' ལྷଙ୍ଗ
- jamyang nyima, 'jam dbyangs nyi ma ལྷଙ୍ଗ རྩୟଙ୍ଗ ཉମା
- jamyang sangbo, 'jam dbyangs bzang po ལྷଙ୍ଗ རྩୟଙ୍ଗ བଙ୍ଗ དପୋ
- jamyang, 'jam dbyangs ལྷଙ୍ଗ རྩୟଙ୍ଗ
- jigten nyingba, 'jig rten rnying pa ལྷିତେ ནନ୍ଦେ དପା
- jigten sarba, 'jig rten gsar pa ལྷିତେ ནନ୍ଦେ ཁସା
- jyekundo, skye rgu mdo ལྷ୍ୱେ གୁରୁ མୋ
- jonda, brgyud mda' ལྷୁନ୍ଦା
- jongzhing nga, ljongs zhing lnga ལྷୁନ୍ଦା ངିନ୍ଦା
- kyegu, skye rgu ལྷ୍ୱେ ཁୁରୁ

## K

- Kaipa Museum, mkhas pa mi gsum କାଇପା ମୁଶି ଗୁମ୍ବା
- kadra, skar bkra କାଦରା
- karze, dkar mdzes କାର୍ଜେ
- karpo, dkar po କାର୍ପୋ
- kham, khams କାମା
- khoryog tshang, khor yug tshang କାହ୍ରୋ ତ୍ଶାଙ୍ଗ
- konchok gelek, dkon mchog dge legs କନ୍ଚୋ ଗେଲ୍କ
- koryug dorlag shaykan, khor yug gtor brlag byed mkhan  
କୋର୍ଯୁଗ ଦୋରଲାଙ୍ଗ ଶାଯକାନ କହ୍ରୁଗ ଗ୍ତୋ ବ୍ରଲାଙ୍ଗ ବୈଏମକାନ

କାଇପା ମୁଶି ଗୁମ୍ବା ପାଇଁ

## L

- labrang, bla brang ଲାବରଙ୍ଗ
- laji 垃圾
- lhalung Paldor, lha lung dpal rdor ଲାଲୁଙ୍ଗ ପାଲ୍ଦୋର
- lhasha, lha bya ଲାଶା
- lhasham, lha bsham ଲାଶମ
- liangji gongjian 两基工建
- Longbao 隆宝

## M

- malho, rma lho ཡླྷོ  
mangra, mang ra ཡଙ୍ଗର  
mani, ma Ni ཡନି  
mingyal, rmang rgyal ཡମ୍ବୁୟା  
Minhe 民和  
minzheng jiuzai 民政救灾

## N

- nag, nag ཡଣ  
nagchu, nag chu ཡଣୁଁ  
nangchen, nang chen ཡନ୍ତେଣ  
nadod, gnas bstod ཡକ୍ଷାସ୍ତୋଦ  
ngawa, rnnga ba ཡାସ  
nyanchong, nyams chung ཡଣ୍ଚୁଂ  
nyiga, nyi dga' ཡିନ୍ଗା  
nyipa, gnyis pa ཡିନ୍ପା

## Q

- Qinghai hua 青海话

- Qinghai 青海

## R

- rinpoche, rin po che ཡିନ୍ପୋଚେ  
rongbo, rong po ཡିନ୍ପୋ  
rongkad, rong skad ཡିନ୍ପକାଦ  
richu tshang, ru chu tshang ཡୁତ୍ଶାଙ୍  
rukag, ru khag ཡୁଖାଗ

## S

- Sala 萨拉, Salar  
samgyal, bsam rgyal ཡମ୍ବୁୟା  
sanag, sa nag ཡାନା  
sancan tanjad, sems can thams can ཡିନ୍ଗାତଙ୍କୁସଙ୍ଗାତଙ୍କୁ  
sang ཡମ୍ବା

sangga, sangs dga' བංචා རුංචා  
sangjyam, sangs rgyam བංචා རුංචා  
sanjan, sems can ཚිංචා ཐංචා

Sanjiangyuan 三江源

Sanjiangyuan Guojiaji Ziran Baohu Qu

三江源国家级自然保护区

sarin, sa rin བංචා

sayig, sa yig བයිචා

sengze, seng ze ཚිංච්චා

shagam, sha skam ཚා ལුංචා

Shanshui 山水

shengtai buchang 生态补偿

Shengtai yimin 生态移民

sheray Gyaltsa, shes rab rgya mtsho ཤේරා ຮුංචා ມක්

shugden, shugs ldan ལුංචා རුංචා

sipeitao 四配套

sodnam, bsod nams དරුංචා རුංචා

sogchag sodkam, srog chags gsod mkhan ལුංචා ກෙණා මරුංචා ມන්

sogtsong, sog rdzong ལුංචා ອුංචා

sumba, gsum pa ལුංචා ພා

suryul, Ser yu ལුංචා ສුරුලු

## T

tanwang, bstan dbang དරුංචා དංචා

tashi dur thang, bkra shis dur thang དුංචා ප්‍රිචා දුංචා

tashi Sangpo, bkra shis bsang po དුංචා ප්‍රිචා ඩංචා

tashi tha thang, bkra shis rta thang དුංචා ණ් ඩංචා

tashi, bkra shis དුංචා

thangkha, thang ga དුංචා

thum med, thum med དුංචා මේද

tsa dang mi da, rtswa 'dang mi 'dug དුංචා ඩීංචා දුංචා

tsachu, bya chu དුංචා, Zhaqu 扎曲

tsampa, rtsam pa བྲୟା  
tsamyang Tso, 'jam dbyangs mtsho ཨମ୍ବାନ୍ଦୁନ୍ଦାକ  
tsanbo thang, bstan po thang ນର୍ଦ୍ଧର୍ମଶବ୍ଦ  
tsanbo, bstan po ນର୍ଦ୍ଧର୍ମଶବ୍ଦ  
tsandan, byams bstan ପ୍ରଥମାନ୍ତର  
tsangyang Gyatso, tshang dbyang rgya mtsho

ହନ୍ଦାନ୍ଦୁନ୍ଦାକ  
tsedra, tshe bkra ହେନ୍ଦ୍ରା  
tsekog, rtse khog କୋର୍ଗ  
tsenor, Tshe nor ଜେଞ୍ଜ  
tsering Bum, tshe ring 'bum ହେରିଂଗ୍ରାମ  
tsering Norbu, tshe ring nor bu ହେରିଂଗ୍ରାମ  
tsobon, tsho dpon ହେନ୍ଦ୍ରକ  
tsochi, mtsho khri କୁର୍ତ୍ତି  
tsochong, tso chung ହେନ୍ଦ୍ରାନ୍ତି  
tsolho, mtsho lho କୁର୍ତ୍ତି  
tsonob, mtsho nub କୁର୍ତ୍ତି  
Tu 土

Tuden, thub bstan ହୃଦୟଶବ୍ଦ  
tugyal, thos rgyal ଶର୍ଣ୍ଣାତ୍ମୀ  
tuimu huancao, 退牧换草

**U**  
udum tsanpo, 'u dum btsan po ଉଦୁମ୍ବାନ୍ଦୁନ୍ଦାକ  
u-tsang, dbus gtsang ଉତ୍ସାନ୍ଦାନ୍ତି

**W**  
walong, hwa lung ଶାଙ୍କୁ  
Wushengqu 五省区

**X**  
Xi Jinping 习近平  
*xiang* 乡  
Xie Xiaolin 谢晓林

Xining 西宁

Xiongda 熊大

## Y

yagbo mida, yag po mi 'dug ཌྷਆଘ་ມི་འདུག

yartsa gumbu, dbyar rtswa dgun 'bu བྱାର୍ རୁସ୍ དୁସ୍ དୁ

yidag, gzhi bdag གྱିଡାଗ

yogbo, g.yog po ཁྱୋଘ

tonthar, g.yang thar གཡନ୍ ଥାର

*yuan* 元

yuchu, g.yu chu གྱୁଚୁ

yulshul, yul shul གྱୁଲ୍ ଶଲ

Yunxiang Wang 王云翔

## Z

zado, rdza stod གླୋତ୍

Zhao Xiang 赵翔

zhen 镇

zheng yi zhi yan, bi yi zhi yan 睁一只眼，闭一只眼

ziling, zi ling གྵିଲିଙ୍

zojya, zo skya གྺୟା